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Penitents Or Prostitutes ?: The Narratives of Fallen Women in Defoe,Richardson, and Fielding

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PENITENTS OR PROSTITUTES?:
THE NARRATIVES OF FALLEN WOMEN
IN DEFOE, RICHARDSON, AND FIELDING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY
BETH MARTIN BIRKY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY 1998

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To David

In narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform.

Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 4

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. . . . We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it;

Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken"

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes a narrative paradigm found in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, and Henry Fielding's *Amelia*. In what I call the fallen woman's narrative, the fallen woman tells the story of her fall to a sympathetic audience. My primary concern is how each author utilizes the conventions of the fallen woman's narrative for his own novelistic purpose. I also explore the relationship between this paradigm and eighteenth-century English middle-class attitudes toward women, money, and morality.

In the introduction, I describe the fallen woman's narrative, which is distinct from other literary representations of fallen women in its unique insistence on narrativity: the first-person narrator and an immediate context for telling the tale to a specific audience. In chapter two I examine how literary representations of chastity and the fallen woman in literature reinforce and resist the material and moral concerns of the eighteenth-century middle class. In chapter three, I discuss how Defoe uses the fallen woman's narrative in the initial episodes of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* to characterize each woman as a sympathetic fallen woman before he complicates that assumption with his own complex portrayal of female sexuality and survival. This chapter also considers the relationship between these two novels and a later Defoe pamphlet, *Some Considerations Upon Streetwalkers*. In chapter four, I examine Anna Howe's request for Clarissa's fallen woman's narrative and her inability to complete that story. By allowing Clarissa's correspondence to prove her innocence, Richardson comments on the superior didactic function of the epistolary genre. In chapter five, I discuss Fielding's unique contrasting of

two fallen women's narratives, one used to seduce a listener and the other used to warn of a similar seduction, to show that a woman's virtue, like all virtue, requires more than chastity and passive resistance. In the conclusion, I indicate evidence of other fallen women's narratives in Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and discuss possible models for and influences of this narrative paradigm in earlier and later fiction.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Young Moll Flanders is seduced by her master; Roxana is forced to become her landlord's mistress to pay the rent after her husband deserts her and her children; Clarissa is held captive and then raped by Lovelace; and Miss Mathews is promised marriage by a young soldier. These are just a few of the numerous seduction scenes in eighteenth-century English novels, and, with each successful seduction, we find a fallen woman who has lost her virtue either before or outside of marriage.

Although virtuous women like Richardson's Pamela are frequently considered the dominant image of women in eighteenth-century novels, fallen women can be found in many contexts in the eighteenth-century: Restoration drama, early fiction by women like Eliza Haywood, scandalous memoirs or "Apologies," pamphlets, periodicals, and even William Hogarth's famous *The Harlot's Progress*. Whether in the role of courtesans, prostitutes, destitute young women, or violated chamber maids, and whether characterized as eager, horrified, desperate, or indulgent, fallen women play a significant role in many eighteenth-century novels.¹ Although fallen women are numerous in

¹ See Ian Bell, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, for reference to an astonishing number of diverse literary and nonliterary sources which refer to prostitutes or fallen women. He notes James Boswell's journal; *The Whore's Rhetorick Calculated to the Meridian of London and Conformed to the Rules of Art in Two Dialogues* (1683); accounts of legal treatment of sexually deviant women in works such as *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, Late Citizen of London* (1705); proposals for reform (Jonas Hanway's *Plan For Establishing a Charity House* [1758], Saunders Welch); dramas such as *The Beggar's Opera*; poetry such as Swift's "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1734); periodical essays such as Steele's *Spectator* papers on prostitution #274 and

Victorian literature and the term fallen woman itself is more current to that period, references to these unchaste or sexually compromised women appear in many critical studies about women in eighteenth-century literature, whether the critic is examining Clarissa and her deification in death or Fanny Hill and her veneration in the male fantasy world of pornography. Critics observe numerous and repeated narrative embodiments of the notion of a fallen woman, in short vignettes and full-length novels, in tragic death and comic relief.²

While many excellent studies mention the sexual woman in eighteenth-century literature, particularly in the context of crime or domestic values, few have done a comprehensive analysis of fallen women and none have considered, in particular, the first-person narratives by fallen women found in eighteenth-century fiction.³ In what I

276 (1712) and Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* (1751); pamphlets such as Defoe's *Essay Upon Projects* (1697) and *Some Considerations Upon Streetwalkers* (1726), as well as an anonymous pamphlet *Satan's Harvest Home: Or, The Present State of Whorecraft, Adultery, Fornication, Procuring, Pimping, Sodomy, etc* (1749), Defoe's later argument in *Augusta Triumphans* (1728) written under the pseudonym Andrew Moreton; Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* [and *The Making of Public Stews*]; and William Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (1731); etc.

² Bell specifically notes fiction by men (Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* [1703]) as well as more familiar novels by Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Smollett) and women (Mary de la Riviere Manley and Eliza Haywood). Carol Houlihan Flynn also offers a helpful description of the historical context of fallen women as evident in both documents ("Letters, memoirs, diaries, court records of rape trials, whores' biographies") and fiction (novels and plays) of the time in *Samuel Richardson*. She notes Richardson's response to the 1748 *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs. Teresia Constantia Phillips* by Mrs. Muilman, and comments in more detail on two other stories of fallen women: *The Accomplished Fine Rake* (1727) and *Memoirs of a Magdalen* (1767). Margaret Ann Doody, in *A Natural Passion*, provides a thorough description of several sources of Richardson's fiction that she finds in early women's fiction.

³ See Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel* (1979); Susan Staves, "British Seduced Maidens" (1981); Jean B. Kern, "The Fallen Woman from the Perspective of Five Early Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists" (1981); Flynn, "Down from the Pedestal: The Fallen Woman in Richardson's World" in *Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters* (1982); Jane Flanders, "The Fallen Woman in Fiction" (1984); Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition*

call the fallen woman's narrative, a woman, usually found in desolate condition, relates the story of her fall so that a listener may better understand her circumstances. Whether the fallen woman is a central or minor character in the novel, her account of her fall is only one episode in a broader narrative. In these first-person stories by fallen women, I have observed identifiable characteristics that suggest a narrative paradigm utilized by each author. Although each woman's situation varies, she is already known to be or perceived as a fallen woman when she begins her tale, and her story follows a plot that includes the background to her fall, the actual seduction, and the resulting consequences. Each narrative also contains recurring features: the narrator's self-characterization of her exceptional appeal and extreme vulnerability, while admitting to and sometimes condemning her own weakness; her construction of a plot in which she is the passive object of her seducer's desire; and her account of the reactions to and consequences of her fall, including her warnings to other young women to avoid a similar fate. While the fallen woman's narrative contains some rhetorical strategies used in other literary representations of fallen women, its most distinguishing characteristic is what I call narrativity, or the emphasis on the circumstances for, process and effects of telling each woman's story.⁴ These first-person narratives offer a unique construction of the fallen woman within literary texts. By acknowledging herself as fallen, each fallen woman as

Counter Tradition (1987); T.G.A. Nelson, "Women of Pleasure" (1987); and Bell, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England* (1991), and John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson* (1992).

⁴ Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* defines "narrativity" as "[t]he set of properties [formal and contextual] characterizing narrative from nonnarrative." My use of narrativity refers to the context in which narrative is constructed and the influence it has on the audience. In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis uses the term "narrativity" to distinguish the function of narrative from its form. According to de Lauretis, "[t]he objective of narrative theory . . . is not therefore narrative but narrativity; not so much the structure of narrative (its component units and their relations) as its work and effects" (105).

narrator of her own experience shifts the emphasis from what actually happened to the effect her story will have on her audience. To that end, each fallen woman's narrative has a specific agenda: to detail the causes and consequences of her current condition in order to influence her audience's perception of her situation. Therefore, the fallen woman found in a fallen woman's narrative is unique from many unchaste or sexually compromised women, prostitutes, adulteresses, or courtesans in literature.

This study examines four eighteenth-century novels which draw on the unique conventions of the fallen woman's narrative. Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding have utilized the fallen woman's narrative in their fiction, adopting and adapting key elements of this narrative paradigm--characterization, narrative structure, and audience--for their own artistic purposes. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) and Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48) offer fallen women as the central heroine, although fallen women's narratives are only one component of their novels. Fielding's *Amelia* (1751) provides a more common use of the fallen woman's story as an interpolated narrative about a minor character.⁵ In each of these novels, the author creates more than a fallen woman and a simple seduction plot; he draws on the unique narrativity of the fallen woman's narrative as part of his own narrative strategy.

⁵ Interpolated narratives, a common feature of eighteenth-century fiction, frequently include the stories of fallen women, such as Sally Godfrey in Richardson's *Pamela*, but these stories are related by other characters. Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) contains the first-person "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality" or the story of Lady Vane. Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) also provides another example of an interpolated fallen woman's narrative told in the first person by Olivia herself. Fallen women's narratives are also found in other contexts, such as Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler*, Nos. 170 and 171. In a letter to the Rambler subtitled "A Prostitute's Story," Misella explains her desperate conditions and the causes of her fall using many of the conventional features found in the narratives of fallen women studied below.

Although *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have a complexity as novels that far surpasses the fallen woman's narrative, key features of the fallen woman's narrative are present in the opening scenes that initially characterize these two famous fictional fallen women. In the case of Richardson's *Clarissa*, the fallen woman's narrative is evident when Clarissa's friend, Miss Howe, asks for a coherent account of her "story" about Lovelace's seduction, a story Clarissa is unable to complete. This moment of narrativity, a request for the story in the fallen woman's words, emphasizes audience expectations for a particular narrative paradigm from the fallen woman herself. Fielding's *Amelia* provides the most self-conscious utilization of the narrativity characteristic of the fallen woman's narrative by allowing two different fallen women to relate their stories in circumstances that significantly influence the main characters, William and Amelia Booth. While the causes and consequences of each woman's fall vary, the construction of her experience into a first-person narrative becomes an important tool for each author's development of character, technique, or theme.

Although containing these unique features, the fallen woman's narrative also shares some features of the seduction plot, which figures in much eighteenth-century literature.⁶ Drama, fiction, and periodicals contain many stories which follow the plot of

⁶ At its core, the fallen woman's narrative is very similar to Lois Bueler's very useful analysis of the components of what she calls the Tested Woman's Plot, of which I think the fallen woman's narrative is a more specific example. The fallen woman's narrative also contains elements of what Flynn refers to as the degradation/elevation pattern utilized in sentimental fiction for the chastening process required for a virtuous heroine. See also Doody's descriptions of courtship plots and seduction plots found in early women's fiction.

In assessing treatments of the fallen woman, Flynn distinguishes between types of seduced women: the "sensual saint," the woman erroneously judged fallen; or the "angelic whore," the redeemed fallen woman. In either plot, the woman was "degraded in the eyes of society before reaching her reward of marriage" (123). She also notes other novels which contain this broader degradation/elevation formula: Laurence Sterne *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778),

male pursuit of a female object. From William Congreve's *Way of the World* to Sir Richard Steele's *Spectator* essay No. 274, seduction provides a significant topic, plot structure, and theme for many eighteenth-century writers. In most seduction plots, an aristocratic rake pursues a vulnerable young woman for the sexual conquest alone.

Although the naive virginal woman is the most common object of pursuit, young married women and widows are also targets.⁷ The seduction strategies vary greatly with some seducers offering straightforward persuasion or simple lies, and others utilizing elaborate ruses such as faked wedding ceremonies and elaborate disguises. While the term seduction is generally limited to enticement without force, seduction plots sometimes include a woman's rape after she has been drugged by her seducer. The outcome of the seductions can be quite different as well—some ending in marriage and some in severe punishment of the woman--although a frequent common outcome is the abandonment of the young woman. When eighteenth-century British society learns that a woman has been seduced, she loses more than her virtue; she loses access to her primary means of security: marriage. Because lost virtue refers to both virginity and reputation, a woman's fall indicates a social classification as well as a physical reality.⁸ If discovered, a fallen

Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), Cumberland's *West Indian* (1771), George Colman and David Garrick's *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766). Flynn also notes that Richardson's own *Familiar Letters* contains the story of a young woman forced into prostitution, while his other novels clearly contain the threat of seduction and misunderstood virtue. Flynn's broad definition of the fallen woman as any female character caught in the degradation/elevation formula makes her discussion very different from my focus on fallen women's narratives.

⁷ Examples of married women who fall include Daniel Defoe's Roxana and Henry Fielding's Mrs. Bennet and Amelia herself.

⁸ Although the term fallen woman was not used until the nineteenth century, it is a common critical category for any sexually unchaste woman, whether she has been seduced or forcefully violated. The distinction is a physical one before it becomes a moral one.

woman faces social condemnation, alienation from family and friends (and potential suitors), and financial destitution due to limited economic opportunities other than prostitution or crime. Although each fallen woman's narrative does follow aspects of the seduction plot, with the scheming, licentious seducer pursuing the innocent victim, I see these narratives as different from the other forms in which the fallen woman is found in eighteenth-century literature. Because of the emphasis on the telling of her tale, each fallen woman's narrative is concerned, not with the young woman's seduction, but with the audience's perception of and reaction to her fall. The fallen woman's narrative becomes an attempt at refiguring the fallen woman, and the features of narrativity—first-person narrator, specific audience, and an emphasis on reception of the story—take on more significance than the fall itself.

In a fallen woman's narrative, the first-person narrator is an important feature which distinguishes the fallen woman's narrative from other seduction stories told by an omniscient narrator or another character.⁹ Therefore, Moll's and Roxana's

⁹ In her study of Richardson's sources for his novels, *A Natural Passion*, Doody surveys the women's fiction which first dealt with many of the themes, plots, and styles later adapted by more canonical male novelists like Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. In describing the elements of the seduction or rape novels, Doody points out the importance of the way these novels figure women as the central characters and often the central voice, observing that many of them use first-person narration. Doody notes the link between the first-person narration and the sense of a young female narrator's emotional importance:

The heroine is the loser in the sex war because of the ironic difference in the female and male attitudes to love, but she is victorious in the novel in being perpetual subject, the centre of the emotional action. The experience of passion as felt by a female is presented as a full emotional experience, as something that matters. Socially, in a licit or illicit amour, woman may be required to be passive, but she is not an object merely, not psychologically inert or inarticulate. Feeling is action; indeed, to a novelist like Mrs. Haywood, the experience of emotion is the only experience that matters. (19)

The emotions of the character are more important than detailed characterization, and the first-person narration emphasizes this emotional content.

autobiographies build on an important female voice; Clarissa's fallen woman's narrative, as requested by Mrs. Howe, is intended to be different from the many letters she has composed to Anna Howe; Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's tales are first-person accounts within a third-person narrative. This first-person narration emphasizes the power narrative offers in assessing, reshaping, and understanding experience.

The direct concern for audience is another important aspect of the narrativity of the fallen woman's narrative. In a general sense, each woman expresses directly the didactic purpose of her narrative: her narrative will serve as a warning to other young women. But beyond this general audience, many fallen women's narratives establish and grow out of an intimate relationship between the fallen woman and her immediate audience. In *Clarissa*, Anna Howe and her mother serve as that audience; in *Amelia*, Miss Mathews actually uses her narrative to seduce Booth, while Mrs. Bennet offers her narrative as a direct warning to Amelia. These audiences are very important for the narrative's didactic purpose and offer a model for the reader's own response to the tale by patterning the effect the story is intended to have.¹⁰

Narrativity also influences plot. On the one hand, the plot of the fallen woman's narrative lacks suspense. Because the narrator is known or assumed to be a fallen

She also notes the use of interpolated stories, or what she calls flashbacks or the "inset story" (66). She refers particularly to the Sally Godfrey story found in Richardson's *Pamela*, an "inset story" that was "common in novels of the time" (66).

¹⁰ Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* lack the same immediate audience found in the characters of Richardson and Fielding. Working from the expectations of autobiography, each woman is concerned for more general response to her tale. Although each woman frequently refers to and anticipates her audience's response, the audience does not become an active component in the construction of the tale itself. In each case, though, the narrating woman's consideration of audience is an important element in emphasizing the moral function involved in *telling* the tale as opposed to the action contained within the tale itself. Defoe uses the fallen woman's narrative to establish the identity of each woman and to draw on audience expectations for this type of tale, expectations he then develops in his extended fiction.

woman, the audience already knows the conclusion of her narrative, which is the point where narration begins, whether that is a moment of crisis (as in the cases of Roxana, Clarissa, Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet) or supposed success (as in the case of Moll). On the other hand, within each novel, the fallen woman's narrative has an interesting lack of resolution and completion because the tale itself is part of the larger plot of the novel as a whole. How the fallen woman's narrative will be received by her audience or how she herself is treated is a question that surpasses the concerns of the fallen woman's narrative itself. So the narrativity that characterizes the fallen woman's narrative concerns the tale itself but also the functioning of the tale within a broader narrative of each novel and how its reception influences the fallen woman's condition..

Because of this unique feature of narrativity, the fallen woman's narrative is an important narrative strategy to consider when studying the novels that contain them. The fallen woman's narrative is also significant because it provides an example of the way that literature both reinforces and resists society's values and beliefs. When a fallen woman stands up and says, "I am a fallen woman, and here is my story," she accepts and confirms society's classification of her. At the same time, the fallen woman's narrative is not the same as society's condemnation of her. "I am a fallen woman" is not the same as "She is a fallen woman." The first-person account has elements of self-definition and self-assertion that give a fallen woman narrator the power to present the conditions of her fall in a way that might alter society's judgment of her behavior. While some in her audience may still conclude that she is immoral and irrevocably fallen, others may conclude that she is not primarily responsible for her loss of virtue and, therefore, should not be simply labeled a fallen woman. In fact, the fallen woman's narrative attempts to redefine fallenness in a way that elicits sympathy and offers an opportunity for redemption.

To that end, the fallen woman's narrative includes elements of confession of as well as justification for a woman's fall. For example, a fallen woman's acknowledgment of her weakness, which is usually vanity, and stock warnings to other women provide a penitential framework for her story. In addition, characterizing herself as beautiful, vulnerable, and powerless places the blame on her seducer and circumstances. Given the right opportunity, the fallen woman herself would have been and could still be a moral individual. These seemingly contradictory stances within one narrative redefine a woman's fallenness without challenging the moral framework in which women's sexuality is judged by society.

While each fallen woman's narrative embodies the tension between reinforcement and resistance of society's values, each author may also offer a double view of the fallen woman's narrative itself and the fallen woman narrator. On the one hand, he might utilize the fallen woman's narrative within the novel to elicit the expected sympathy for and redefinition of a woman's fallenness. Although Richardson suggests that *Clarissa's* untold fallen woman's narrative would provide full justification for her situation, his own epistolary narrative achieves that redefinition as well and perhaps, he suggests, even better. On the other hand, an author might use a fallen woman's narrative in a way that proves a fallen woman's inability to successfully or sincerely redeem herself. Defoe, for example, constructs *Moll's* and *Roxana's* initial appeals for sympathy through the fallen woman's narrative in the opening episode of each novel. In subsequent episodes, as each woman's behavior contradicts her initial claims of penitence, Defoe critiques the hollow rhetoric of the fallen woman's narrative when it is not supported by a woman's actions. Fielding offers examples of both a sincere and an insincere use of the fallen woman's narrative, using the contradictions between the two narratives as part of his broader theme that virtue requires an active struggle with vice. Every author handles this tension of the

fallen woman's narrative differently, while also drawing on the dynamics existing between reinforcement of and resistance to social ideology in his novel. As the site of and a tool for both confirmation and critique of society's values, the fallen woman's narrative is an important pattern to consider. The fallen woman's narrative provides insight into the complexity of literary constructions, in general, and the representation of women's sexuality, in particular.

Although the fallen woman's narrative is only one strategy utilized by each novelist, it plays a significant role within the broader narratives in which it is found. In some cases, the fallen woman's narrative provides an opportunity for Defoe, Richardson, or Fielding to comment on his own limitations and strengths as a narrator. Particularly in Fielding's novel, a character's response to a fallen woman's narrative offers a model for the reader's own reaction and aids Fielding's own influence over his reader. At times, the fallen woman's narrative serves as metadiscourse, providing an internal commentary on the construction of and effect of fiction-making on identity and society. The relationship between the fallen woman's narrative and each author's theme and narrative strategy provides valuable insight into each novel's purpose. Defoe adapts the fallen woman's narrative as characterization, Richardson as technique, and Fielding as theme.

In analyzing the fallen woman's narrative in these four novels, I pose questions that have more to do with structure than with character or motif. What are the components of the narrative paradigm and how are they invoked or adapted in each account? Why the importance of narrativity, with the self-conscious construction of a story and the overt relationship of narrator and audience? What relationship does the fallen woman's narrative have to the novel in which it exists? In the following pages, I will trace the function of the fallen woman's narrative as an element of characterization,

narrative style, and theme in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Richardson's *Clarissa*, and Fielding's *Amelia*.

CHAPTER 2
FUNCTIONS OF THE FALLEN WOMAN IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION:
MIDDLE-CLASS MYTHS OF MONEY AND MORALITY

Although my particular interest lies in the way the fallen woman's narrative functions within the broader narrative strategies of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, I am also interested in the fallen woman as image and the seduction plot as a narrative pattern, two aspects of my topic which are the subject of much critical debate. The images themselves are ancient ones, whether found in the myth of Medusa or biblical accounts of Mary Magdalene. Analysis of the fallen woman in literature leads to examination of how images, myths, and narrative patterns found in fiction relate to historical circumstances women faced as well as to the assumptions and attitudes about gender and sexuality. The particular fallen woman's narrative I have identified builds on many of the issues and images found in the construction of fallen women in literature. Most particularly relevant is the relationship between the fallen woman in literature and the material and moral concerns of the eighteenth-century middle class.¹

Consideration of the fallen woman is most common in nineteenth-century literary criticism with many critics citing the emergence of organized reform movements and

¹ Although "middle class" is a term that was not used in the eighteenth century and does not account for the complex social distinctions in eighteenth-century English society, I use it here, as other critics do, to represent the non-aristocratic social class with new and increasing financial, political, and social power through means such as trade and industry.

advances in the women's movement as several reasons why the fallen woman was a social reform issue and a literary motif in the Victorian novel.² Many critics trace the fallen woman as a character type and her moral degeneration or redemption as themes representing nineteenth-century perceptions of women's sexuality and concern for social reform. Few of these studies deal directly with the eighteenth century, except perhaps to mention Moll Flanders as an early example of a fallen woman.

In contrast to the critical studies of the fallen woman in nineteenth-century literature, no eighteenth-century critical study deals exclusively with the fallen woman. In references to fallen women within critical works focusing on a particular author, like Defoe, or a specific issues, like crime, none identify first-person narratives by fallen women or address the specific paradigm I call the fallen woman's narrative. But many of these critical discussions of fallen women in eighteenth-century literature raise important issues relevant to the consideration of the fallen woman's narrative in novels by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. In *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-century English Novels*, Patricia Meyers Spacks argues that "fiction creates and conveys its truths through plot" because the "dynamic narrative organization of events we call plot engages our desire . . . and controls our comprehension" (2). In the following pages, I will explore how the narratives of fallen women correspond to, enact, and influence middle-class desires for financial and moral authority.

² See studies such as those by Amanda Anderson, Charles Bernheimer, Vern and Bonnie Bullough, Jane Flanders, Beth Kalikoff, Eric Trudgill, George Watt, and Tom Winnifrith.

The Fallen Woman and Middle-Class Fictions

The fallen woman's narrative must be examined as a construction within eighteenth-century society, in which literature, particularly the "radical" new genre of the novel, played a significant role. Although literary constructs have some correlation to lived experience (fallen women certainly existed and were labeled as such in eighteenth-century England), they are also shaped by and influence the way a society thinks about and characterizes a particular experience or issue. Narrative representation, no matter how realistic or mimetic an author intends it to be, is always a construction shaped by social values and must be examined as a conscious or unconscious response to and influence on those forces. Most eighteenth-century critics agree that one of the most important factors influencing eighteenth-century literature was the emerging middle class and the economic, political, and social ramifications of that development. An examination of the relationship between social values and literary constructions illuminates how Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding utilize and adapt standard images and narrative structures related to the fallen woman.

Woman and Material Concerns

The most commonly noted feature of eighteenth-century society is the middle class's struggle against the aristocratic definition of a social order based on landed property and birth. The middle class challenged those two elements as avenues to power, asserting its power through the financial authority associated with trade and individual merit (the building blocks of good capitalism). While rejecting the aristocratic basis for social hierarchy, the middle class did not reject principles of hierarchy that place men, rich and hardworking men at least, on the top of the social heap. Women, therefore, were

subordinate in all respects, and the educational, legal, economic, religious, and literary narratives demonstrate and reinforce this position.

In many ways, middle-class values and ideology play an important role in the analysis of the fallen woman in eighteenth-century literature because she embodies both the material and moral values of the middle class in conflict with the aristocracy. In the material realm, the fallen woman is often part of literary constructions dealing with redefinition of class relations as well as the relationship between women and property. On the one hand, the middle class condemned the aristocratic view of women as property. After all, the middle class perceived, and capitalism promised, new ways of acquiring fortune besides marriage into money. Although issues of class and financial security are still present in discussions of marriage, individual choice and romance take on increasing significance throughout the eighteenth century.³ While motives for marriage are redefined, the institution of marriage itself is never questioned. The dominance of the marriage plot in eighteenth-century fiction reveals narrative structures that elevate married heterosexual love and the sexual hierarchy of male authority and female subjugation. The fallen woman's narrative warns potential transgressors of this hierarchy.

The middle-class valuing of marriage for love rather than money results in a new emphasis on courtship and romance as features of marriage in fiction. In the fallen woman's narrative, the sexual conflict at the heart of the seduction plot offers a physical embodiment of these financial and emotional concerns. As historians such as Lawrence Stone and literary critics such as Joseph Allen Boone have indicated, changes in marriage patterns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulted in courtship changes, a

³ In *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England 1660-1753*, Lawrence Stone observes that the "clash between the conflicting ideals of patriarchy and individualism in the choice of a spouse reached an acute stage at this time [1680 to 1710], just as the rival motives of affection or interest also came into serious conflict" (12-13).

testing out of a relationship prior to marriage that led to new dynamics, one of which was sexual.⁴ The seduction plot enacts those dynamics and reinforces appropriate conclusions to sexual conflict. At the same time, the sexual conflict is frequently portrayed as the result of aristocratic abuse of power. The repeated pattern of an upper-class man seducing, deceiving, or raping a woman from a lower class indicts aristocratic society for the licentiousness and cruelty. Class issues are an integral part of these narrative constructions, and the financial is very often a key element in the seduction, because the woman is not only physically and emotionally vulnerable but also economically disadvantaged.

Economic conflicts abound in a fallen woman's narrative, and male power is always superior to a woman's material and physical powerlessness. As a female servant, Moll is given little regard by the rich older brother once his physical desire is satiated, and she has few alternatives as a fallen woman other than marrying the younger brother. Roxana's financial success is a sad commentary on the means an abandoned wife uses to survive. Society allows her wealth as a courtesan, but her illicit attempts at financial and social security lead to serious consequences. Although the conflict between Clarissa and Lovelace becomes much more complex than a class battle, Lovelace's motives are those of the licentious, aristocratic rake who sees the pursuit of Clarissa's virginity as a game and her destruction as a satisfying revenge on her presumptuous and mercenary family. In addition, Clarissa's initial consideration of leaving the protection of her father's house stems from the threat of a forced marriage to Roger Solmes, a match which her family proposes for financial rather than romantic reasons. Financial issues are clearly a part of Fielding's *Amelia* as the noble lord uses promises of financial support for Mrs. Bennet's

⁴ See also Katherine Sobba Green on the courtship novel.

and Amelia's husbands to gain each woman's trust. In each of these narratives, financial struggles are acted out in sexual struggles which result in a fallen woman.

Rather than serving only as an indictment of aristocratic abuses and women's legal powerlessness, the fallen woman's narrative also reinforces the security of women's married position (while retaining individual integrity through pursuing romantic love and choosing her married state willingly) by demonstrating the physical and moral insecurity of a woman without the protection of a responsible and dominant male figure. The fallen women's narratives often attack men's irresponsible handling of money and property, reinforcing the idea that male irresponsibility will result in the defilement and destruction of women. Conflicts might be initiated by husbands frittering away fortunes or not adequately preparing for a woman's financial security or a father's making marriage plans according to financial concerns alone. In these cases, women are the victims, but the solution is male responsibility, not female authority.

According to Angela Smallwood, in *Fielding and the Woman Question*, an author's sympathetic treatment of the social conditions of women never includes a radical revision of female power or equality. In what she calls the rationalist-feminist debate of the eighteenth century, both men and women argue for more reasonable treatment of women within the existing social hierarchy of the sexes. While Smallwood is not directly concerned with the portrayal of fallen women, she does treat many of the social injustices (abuses of male authority, limited property rights, inadequate education, etc.) that eighteenth-century women faced and which provide a context for the seduction and destruction of otherwise virtuous women, whether young or old. Within this debate, and also within Fielding's portrayal of women, Smallwood asserts, no one in the eighteenth century argued for women's sexual freedom, but they did argue against the sexual double standard that left women vulnerable to licentious rakes, especially those of the upper

class.⁵ The repeated theme in the feminist debate concerning women's financial limitations as a cause of their powerlessness against sexual victimization is closely related to the basic financial conflicts at the heart of all the fallen women's narratives I am examining.

Although never using the term "fallen woman," Boone, in *Tradition Counter Tradition*, sees the seduction plot that leads to a woman's fall as reinforcement of social structures for men and women. Boone traces the marriage theme in its three basic plot trajectories which he calls the courtship, seduction, and wedlock plots, with the courtship as the comic plot, the seduction as tragic, and the wedlock containing elements of both. The resolution of all love plots, whether celebrating the virtuous or condemning the fallen, he argues, offers a pattern endorsing marriage and social stability.

Boone's definition of the seduction plot contains elements I find in the fallen woman's narrative, which demonstrates the consequences that result when a woman transgresses the social ideal of marriage as the basis of secure property, procreation, and power. While the term seduction encompasses a variety of romantic and sexual pursuits, Boone argues that all seduction plots begin with a conflict between sexual antagonists and most frequently involve a man's persistent stratagems and a woman's continued resistance.⁶ Whether the actual sexual encounter occurs through mutual consent or forced

⁵ Although Smallwood considers several of Fielding's fallen women, she never offers any analysis of their presence, noting only that these characters become part of Fielding's benign argument for virtue that is free of gender restrictions.

⁶ Although Boone focuses his study on the plots of *Clarissa* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, he offers a helpful overview of what he classifies as seduction plots. According to Boone, pre-Richardsonian models were generally unsophisticated narratives based on sexual and economic conflict: most plots involved a "gradual transformation of a popular definition of 'true love' as irresistible, scandalous passion into the didactic rubric of 'true married love' as piously respectable passion" (68-9). He also refers to the early "'secret histories'" or "scandal narrative," both of which are related but very different sources of the fallen woman's narrative because of the absence

violation of the woman, the seduction plot ends tragically with the division of the two characters through death or despair.⁷ Cases where the woman is the seducer do exist but are quite rare and are offered, as in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, as a comic inversion of the familiar pattern or as a portrayal of female wickedness. Because the fallen woman's narrative is based on the assumption of female as victim, my reference to the relationship between the fallen woman's narrative and the seduction plot assumes, like Boone's, male as agent and female as object, but the fallen woman's narrative offers a key difference from the desperate scenarios Boone describes.⁸ Because of the first-person confessional structure of the narratives I am examining, especially in Fielding's case, some of the suspense is eliminated; we know that the woman is fallen and now finds herself in crisis that inspires the telling of her tale, but we also know she has survived in some manner and is facing an audience that holds potential sympathy for her condition.⁹

of love in most cases. Boone also notes later forms of the seduction plot in the gothic tradition, the sentimentalized tradition (which usually reverts to a courtship plot), and finally the contemporary novel where the waning emphasis on virginity reduces the significance of seduction, although the "persisting tragedy of sexual combat and female victimization" is evident in contemporary novels (113).

⁷ Boone interestingly distinguishes between the female victims of the seduction plot and what he refers to as the "fallen woman," who like the "rapacious seducer" has "betrayed the higher dictates of morality and married love" (100). What is interesting here is Boone's description of a fallen woman as antagonist to the virtuous woman, revealing the tendency even among critics to link fallenness with sexual licentiousness, an equation that the many fallen woman's narratives attempt to refute. While some women may be seducers, many women in these novels are rarely given the opportunity to be seducers until they themselves were seduced and perceived as irrevocably fallen. Moll Flanders and Roxana are good examples of this.

⁸ See Teresa de Lauretis' account of the way narrative embodies agency as masculine and passivity as feminine in *Alice Doesn't*.

⁹ Although Roxana's tale begins with this same sense of stability (see editor's preface), the abrupt ending suggests a darker outcome.

Boone also notes that fallen women, whom he characterizes as consciously defying sexual standards or willingly succumbing to seduction, suffer the most severe punishments, although all seduction plots involve a woman's deterioration:

In the classic seduction plot, the male's physical and psychological combat with the virginal heroine invariably unlocks the story of her fall, abandonment, broken heart, and death: its trajectory of decline and descent is as tragic as the ascendant star of successful courtship is generally comedic. (102)

While I agree with Boone's determination that all seduction plots end up reinforcing the marriage plot, some, but not all, fallen women's narratives bear out his thesis concerning the "trajectory of decline." In fact, the seduction plot contained within the fallen woman's narrative is subsumed by the fallen woman's anticipation of some potential for redemption by telling her tale.

The conclusion of what Boone calls a seduction plot probably constitutes the biggest difference between Boone's definition of the seduction plots and my definition of a fallen woman's narrative. With the exception of *Clarissa*, the fallen women in the novels I have studied are not permanently destroyed by their seductions.¹⁰ Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet tell their stories as victims and survivors of seduction. Fielding even demonstrates each woman's physical survival, although the social and moral conditions of Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet differ at the conclusion of the novel. Even though Roxana's narrative is incomplete and Moll's autobiography raises questions about her sincerity, both women begin writing from the vantage point of security, having survived the initial fall in various ways.

Many of the fallen women's narratives, as I define them, do contain elements of what Boone later describes as "admonitory subplots" where the seduction plots become

¹⁰ *Clarissa's* death is interpreted by *Clarissa* herself and many readers as a noble victory, not a defeat.

exempla and reinforce the marriage ideal, although I would argue that the fallen woman's narrative supports an author's individual moral theme as well. Boone also notes elements common to all versions of the seduction plot, which are present in fallen women's narratives: the victimization of women, the threat of the double standard (to ideals of true love), sexual stereotyping of the male as either powerful threat or savior, and feminine passivity. Although these elements all contribute to the portrayal of a woman as victim, they serve as a warning to readers. The fallen woman's narrative also warns readers of these threats to a woman's virtue, while encouraging readers to find security through the appropriate behavior prescribed by society, behavior that enables a woman to secure her most valued role as wife and mother.

Woman and Moral Concerns

Although each fallen woman's financial and sexual vulnerability is an indictment of aristocratic values, the attack on financial power itself is never sustained. Aristocratic claims to power are challenged but on moral, not financial or political, grounds. As many critics have indicated, the material issues and the political issues implied are masked by the construction of moral values. Being recognized as an individual of value with financial rights not tied to birthright (and the gendered version of that is to be an individual of value within the financial hierarchy of the patriarchal system) is not just financially prudent; it is also morally superior. One of the tactics used to revalue the new political and financial system was to imbue the new order with moral significance. A woman adhering to limits of her role as a woman is moral; a woman transgressing those limits is immoral. The literary constructions of the fallen woman relate the moral value of women's chastity to the material struggles between the middle class and the aristocracy. Hence, we get the moral value of the chastity of women.

Using literary constructions to embody assumptions about morality are part of what Nancy Armstrong terms a “political history of the novel,” the subtitle of her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. In her analysis of the emerging domestic ideal in fiction, Armstrong sees texts concerned with women and their domestic sphere (and I would add the fallen woman who has lapsed from standards of virtue) as an important site for the political battle for cultural dominance between the emerging middle class and the waning aristocracy, a battle often waged in moral rather than economic terms. Armstrong attempts to explain the role of fiction in constructing and enforcing notions of gender and sexuality, particularly the distinction between the domestic as feminine and the political as masculine. By idealizing the female in a domestic context as a virtuous and morally influential individual, eighteenth-century authors construct a fiction which represents a shift from power through political actions to power through private, moral qualities. By defining what is desirable in a woman (and what the consequences are for those not adhering to expectations), literature, both fiction and nonfiction, participated in a massive redefinition of the individual and masked the political agenda of the middle class with the personal agenda of the moral individual.

Part of that middle-class morality had implications for women. In spite of changing attitudes toward marriage for love, or the “companionate marriage” as Stone terms it, female sexuality still retained much of its property value for men even in the new social economy of the eighteenth century. Chaste versus unchaste remained a primary classification of women in eighteenth-century society and an important criterion in establishing what Armstrong defines as the domestic woman.¹¹ Jane Flanders argues

¹¹ See Bridget Hill’s discussion of the importance of chastity in her introduction to *Eighteenth-Century Women*. She includes in her text a passage from Jeremy Collier’s *Essays Upon Several Moral Subjects* (1705) in which he asserts that “when a woman can prevail with her self, to set her conscience and her honour aside, to rush through her native modesty, and the reservedness of her education, she is strangely degenerated, and

that the economic significance of chastity led to a “cultivation of delicacy and purity as manifestations of middle-class morality” (102).

While concerned with the issue of chastity and morality, the fallen woman’s narrative complicates the dichotomy between chaste and unchaste and opens the possibility of redefining chastity as more than virginity and, as a result, establishing a more secure and acceptable position for a fallen woman in society. On the one hand, the very category of fallenness reinforces the equation of chastity and morality. As stated above, accepting the label of fallen woman affirms society’s judgment of a woman’s sexual and moral condition. An author also uses the fallen woman’s narrative to support assumptions about the criteria for women’s morality. If a fallen woman is sufficiently contrite about her fallen condition and penitent for any role she played in her fall, she supports the values of the domestic woman by conforming to them. In the case of Fielding, the fallen woman’s narrative further upholds the domestic ideal by redirecting the standard seduction plot through Mrs. Bennet’s fallen woman’s narrative, which protects Amelia from a similar fate. Even when a fallen woman does not tell her tale as sincere repentance, she still supports the domestic ideal by proving the dangers of transgression. In her unrepentant state, she threatens to destroy all social order and middle-class values, as is seen in Moll’s thieving or Miss Mathews’ efforts to break up the Booths’ marriage. In these negative cases, the fallen woman becomes an example of the licentiousness that corrupts individuals and the immorality that threatens society. But even in the instances where the fallen woman’s narrative reinforces assumptions about women’s sexuality and morality, it redefines some aspects of women’s fallen nature by incorporating elements that remove some of the woman’s responsibility for her fall and

mightily alter’d from what God has made her. She that’s untrue to her husband, and has broken the covenant of her God, is all bane and blemish. She stains the blood of the family, brings in a foreign issue, and quarters the enemy upon that estate” (28).

locate her morality in her subsequent response to her fallenness. Both Fielding's Mrs. Bennet and Miss Mathews are fallen women, and their tales support that they are initially the victims of seductions. But Mrs. Bennet is able to escape the limited category of fallen woman to assume a new role as wife and mother.

In her analysis of the Tested Woman plot, Lois Bueler places the moral distinction of chaste and unchaste in a broader context, arguing that a moral test becomes an important means of measuring the individual (and human nature in general) and upholding the authority of the laws that guide society. Bueler further examines why chastity becomes the central moral test for women:

The legalistic tradition out of which the story of the test arises, a tradition in which obedience to a prohibition is the moral key, comes to focus on a figure whose social identity is primarily defined in terms of her obedience to a prohibition. Unlike a man, a woman occupies her appropriate place in such a patriarchal society by means of, and only by means of, the fact that her sexual services are appropriately reserved or restricted in obedience to patriarchal prerogative. Her virtue--all her virtue--lies in what she does not do, what she refuses to do. In effect she becomes emblematic of an entire moral system based on prohibition. But when morality is based on prohibition and on prohibition alone, when the only virtue lies in refusal, then virtue can only be demonstrated under pressure. Without the occasion which allows its violation it is mere potential. Thus the prelapsarian Adam and Eve have no moral character; they just are. We have no basis for a moral estimate because there has been no opportunity for disobedience and therefore no moral choice. The same effect holds for the woman whose moral character is exclusively defined in terms of the passive virtue of chastity. Until she either violates or refuses to violate the prohibition which defines her, she has no moral character. Only a test which forces a choice can make her morality actual. (24)

Within a patriarchal society that primarily values women's sexual role, the sexual becomes moral and the prohibition against any sexuality outside the condoned reproductive situation proves the test for any woman's morality. To be virtuous is to be chaste.

Although the idea of a chaste woman was considered a moral issue, it was also important to the eighteenth-century middle class for economic issues (male control of capital) and social issues (male superiority in social hierarchy). In the same way, the immorality of the fallen woman also has social, political, and financial implications. The fallen woman becomes a didactic model of the wickedness of sexual freedom and the virtue of sexual restraint, reinforcing those two alternatives and demonstrating always the success of the heterosexual marriage for moral (and happy) individuals and the failure or destruction that results from any divergence from that order. The moral scheme that places a woman in a position inferior to men--submissive, domestic, private, and chaste--reinforces the social hierarchy that supports the political and material concerns of the emerging middle class. At the same time, the conflicts found in the fallen woman's narrative locate the cause of a woman's fall outside the woman herself by indicting aristocratic abuses and male irresponsibility. In the fallen woman's narrative, the fallen woman is portrayed as a victim of corruptions in the social system, not of the system itself. Even though the fallen woman's narrative affirms conventional views of women and supports the values of the middle class, it redefines women's sexual fallenness in slightly different terms and provides new possibilities for a fallen woman's role in society. The fallen woman's narrative never completely undermines the conventional definition of a woman's role in society, but, depending on how a particular author uses it within a novel, it can broaden the definition of women's virtue.

Images of Fallen Women

Because the new middle-class value system in the eighteenth century was still based on patriarchal authority, the feminine in literature served as a site onto which male fears about gaining and retaining power are projected through the construction of images and plots. The fallen woman, in particular, represents these desires and fears in two

ways. On the one hand, by writing about a woman's fall, a male author can explore the transgressions of woman's proper role in a way that shows what he desires and what he fears could happen. On the other hand, the fallen woman still reinforces the author's ideal woman through either the fallen woman's destruction or reformation. Most critics see images of fallen women in eighteenth-century fiction relating to male fears about sexuality, rationality, and power.

Any literary construction emerges from accepted images and patterns. For example, the representations of fallen women are often drawn from what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call the "mythic masks," such as virgin and whore, angel and monster, which have been used for centuries to characterize women according to male fears and desires (16). The fallen woman character, theme, or motif has been a significant image of women found in literature. As Flanders describes,

[t]he overwhelming popularity of the "fallen" woman as a subject for fiction testifies to the novel's function as a critical commentary on middle-class society both as a mirror of ordinary experience and as a means of shaping consciousness. The obsessive concern with chastity, typically identified with spiritual purity, honor, and virtue, and the terrors of deviating from this ideal tell us much about the social, sexual, and psychological experience of women in recent centuries and show the persistence of ancient attitudes and fears regarding women's sexual nature even into modern times. (97)

Noting the large number of fallen women in fiction, from the pathetic and destroyed to the sentimentalized and redeemed, Flanders argues that the eighteenth-century novel is specifically responding to or embodying middle-class concerns for chastity, individualism, and property.

Offering perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of fallen women in eighteenth-century fiction, Carol Houlihan Flynn devotes a chapter of *Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters* to the subject of the fallen woman. In her analysis, Flynn sees constructions of

fallen women emerging from male desire for power and fear of women's sexual, social, or intellectual freedom as a threat to that power. According to Flynn, the fear of female sexuality is related to the fear of elements important to male authority yet outside direct male control. Noting the "obsessive fear of female sexuality" (132), Flynn reviews the common fears about women's sexuality: 1) that a woman may have a sexual appetite of her own; 2) that a woman might cuckold her husband; 3) that a woman could threaten property lines with an illegitimate child; 4) that a woman may have animal needs; 5) or that an impure woman might corrupt a pure man (133). Women's sexuality poses a threat to male power and authority, both physical and social. For this reason, women's freedom is a particular target of male fears.

According to Flynn, the simplistic dichotomy between fallen and exalted women denies women's individual freedom and power by limiting their alternatives: "Early in their virginal careers, women were forced to choose between the roles of saint and whore; there could be no middle ground" (128). The assumption of wickedness and saintliness left women very little room for acceptable sexuality, even within marriage. Flynn summarizes the dual bind that resulted for women in eighteenth-century England because their sexuality was either completely repressed or exploited and abhorred:

Both feminine figures--the sublime, pure maid and the fallen woman--animated the imagination of the eighteenth century. While the sentimental "angel" was honored for her sexually sublimated nature, her fallen counterpart often absorbed the sexual aggression withheld from the angel. However chaste the angel might be, she was always in danger of falling: no one was ever safe from ruin. (99)

Flynn concludes that constructions of the fallen woman in eighteenth-century society emerge from these assumptions and emotional fears.¹² The classification of women based on their sexuality results in the images of women as angels or whores and the narratives

¹² See chapter 3 for Defoe's similar ambivalence in *Some Considerations upon Streetwalkers*.

that place the testing of women's virtue at their heart. In adapting the fallen woman's narratives, Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding reveal these same conflicted views of women. In characterizing the fallen woman herself and the way society judges her sexual corruption, they utilize common images of woman as whore. In the woman's role as narrator and her immediate audience's sympathy for her plight, we see some modification of this simplistic dichotomy. Discussion in the subsequent chapters reveals ambivalent portraits of women who are labeled as fallen but not so clearly blamed for their fall.

Patterns of Fallenness

In examining the fallen woman's narrative, my concern is not merely for what masks are assigned, although those are a significant part of constructing the fallen woman, but also what structural roles fallen women have in the plot and how their narratives function in the novel as a whole. While demonstrating a concern for society's view of women, the almost formulaic process of telling this fallen woman's narrative in a novel offers insight into the way a notion like virtue or fallenness is constructed through the narrative process. The plot of each fallen woman's narrative, like many seduction plots, places a woman in a powerless role, as an object of pursuit, possession, and subsequently either condemnation or redemption at the hands of a man. The narrative replicates the process of a woman's "fall" and engages readers in sympathizing with but accepting the probable outcomes to the sexual conflict in fiction and in life. At the same time, each fallen woman has an unusual power in the opportunity to construct her own story in a way that influences her audience and use the act of narration as one response, sincere or not, to her fallen state. Her role within the broader plot of the novel also explores her power to respond to her circumstance, although her options are still limited by the social and legal restrictions women faced in the eighteenth century. Depending on

the way an author uses the woman's power to tell her story within the broader plot of the novel, he can show her agency to be an avenue to redemption or further condemnation.

Many critics demonstrate how narrative structures enact the assumptions about and possibilities for women in eighteenth-century society. In *Tradition Counter Tradition*, Boone demonstrates how the structure of the marriage plot reinforces assumptions about gender as biological difference and aligns roles and actions according to sex. The active male protagonist and passive female objects or antagonists operate according to the gender roles prescribed for them by society. When the sexual conflict initiated in courtship or seduction culminates in a secure marriage relationship, the plot supports the social, political, and sexual hierarchy that places women in a subordinate role to men. When the conflict results in a woman's fall, the plot also establishes female subordination to male authority, providing evidence that outside marriage a woman is even more powerless to find security and happiness. I would add that when the fallen woman tells her story, the plot based on sexual conflict concludes with new possibilities besides marriage or prostitution. By telling her story to others, the fallen woman may be able to redeem herself and have new options, but the didactic message of her story reinforces the existing social hierarchy. The fallen woman's narrative tests the limits of middle-class values but subsequently reinforces them.

The use of plot structure to enact and bolster authorial and societal assumptions is demonstrated by Raymond Hilliard's analysis of eighteenth-century plots in "Desire and the Structure of Eighteenth-century Fiction." Although not directly addressing fallen women, Hilliard argues that eighteenth-century novelists use desire for personal autonomy as the impetus for their plots; the resolution of plots frequently demonstrates the belief that such desires will ultimately fail, need to be relinquished for a proper position in society, and lead to destruction. Ultimately, Hilliard asserts, all eighteenth-century novelists try to negotiate a culminating, stable relationship between self and

society for their characters, particularly in finding a secure place in society. While the fallen woman's narrative itself also contains a plot that demonstrates the destruction caused by the pursuit of individual desires over social standards, it functions in the novel as a whole in a slightly different manner. In each novel, a fallen woman without a proper place in society uses the act of narration to negotiate a more secure role for herself.

While Defoe shows the limits of words alone as a means of moral restoration, Fielding demonstrates that narratives can define as well as provide access to those roles. Mrs. Bennet's successful use of the fallen woman's narrative secures the esteem of her friends and the opportunity to remarry.

In examining what she calls a sentimental formula of a woman's fall, Flynn also exposes the way the idea of fallenness or virtue is replicated by the plot structure. Although examining fallen women in many literary texts, in fiction Flynn finds the basic sentimental formula:

When we look at the sentimental novels and plays, the stereotypes tell us one important thing: virtue had to be tested, proven under fire. Only after undergoing her trial could the sentimental object of adoration be elevated to her proper sphere. And even at the pinnacle, she was still at risk, liable to fall. The elevated woman, preserver of morality, won her exalted place because she had been lowered, literally or figuratively. Fallen women serve as a warning, in part, to keep their respectable counterparts in place. (100)

This sentimental pattern described by Flynn is at the core of the fallen woman's narrative as well, but it is important to note a key distinction between this "formula" or paradigm as Flynn describes it and the fallen woman's narrative I have defined. In the fallen woman's narrative, the very act of narration serves to elevate the woman in an unusual sense. She cannot be restored to the secure "sentimental object of adoration," but she is given a new dignity through the power of her story, the didactic function she can serve, and the influence she has over her audience.

The Fallen Woman's Narrative as Resistance

While the fallen woman's narrative can be viewed as a literary construction reinforcing middle-class ideology, it must also be acknowledged that elements of that same narrative serve to challenge some assumptions about women's nature. And, as discussed in the following chapters, each author finds himself using the fallen woman's narrative to challenge some conventional views of women. Literature (consciously or unconsciously) contains challenges to social ideology. In many studies of a particular theme or motif, critics also identify areas where a particular schema breaks down. Boone describes the marriage plot he observes in fiction and asserts that, through its content and form, the novel reinforces a pattern of belief but also challenges the assumptions of the traditional belief:

For the contradictions marking the novel as a radical but conventional literary form have simultaneously marked its representations of romantic love, generating a system of narrative strategies that have alternately explained, evaded, and (less frequently) exploded the tradition of romantic wedlock embedded in Anglo-American fiction since its beginnings. (1)

By asserting that the novel has played this dual role of enforcer and dissenter, Boone aligns himself with Mikhael Bakhtin's notion of the novel as an unfixed, evolving form that contains diverse and often competing social views. As Michael Holquist describes in his introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, "'novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system" (xxx). The multiple voices in a novel comprise what Bakhtin labels the "dialogic" aspect of fiction. Thus, when studying any novel, Boone sees the potential for uncovering these multiple voices and gaining insight into tears in the apparently seamless ideology of the eighteenth century:

... the very act of deciphering the many plots by which social ideologies of love and sexuality have given shape to a novelistic marriage tradition uncovers a simultaneous counter-narrative: the persistent “undoing” of the dominant tradition by the contradictions concealed within the specific forms that its representations of “life” and “love” have assumed. (2)

This contradictory impulse, Boone suggests, shows that the relationship between literature, both its content and form, and ideology is reciprocal albeit complex. Ideology is not just “a simplistic scheme of hegemonic ideas imposed from above” or “a model in which the work and ideology are coeval mirrors” (Boone 7); it is the complex patterns that operate to embody and eliminate difference. As Bakhtin writes in “The Problem of the Text,” “the author of a literary work (a novel) creates a unified and whole speech work (an utterance). But he creates it from heterogeneous, as it were, alien, utterances” (*Speech Genres* 115). Ultimately, though, no matter how dissonant and radical the voices it contains, a novel’s plot generally attempts to overcome obstacles and bring closure to conflict. Boone suggests that a novel’s resolution offers a culturally validated solution to a conflict.

In the traditional love-plot, this sexual ideology has been most forcefully registered in the fictional idealization of the married state as the individual’s one true source of earthly happiness. Likewise, the power of the fictional marriage tradition owes much of its idealizing appeal to its manipulation of the form to evoke an illusion of order and resolution that, as we have seen, glosses over the contradictions, the inequities, concealed in the institution of marriage itself. One result is the tradition’s appearance of an overarching unity and authority, nowhere so evident as in the codification of its narrative plots into recognizable, repeating, and contained structures. Of these, variations upon situations of courtship, seduction, and wedlock form the most common trajectories ascribed to the course of love; whether or not marriage is actually attained, these patterns almost uniformly uphold the *concept* of romantic wedlock as their symbolic center and ideal end. (9)

Although plots reinforce a culminating unity, the tensions within the plot itself embody a resistance to that unity.

One of those tensions can also be developed through characters that challenge existing norms. Tony Tanner's *Adultery in the Novel* examines the place of adultery in eighteenth-century concepts of social contract and transgression:

The novel, in its origin, might almost be said to be a transgressive mode, inasmuch as it seemed to break, or mix, or adulterate the existing genre-expectations of the time. It is not for nothing that many of the protagonists of the early English novels are socially displaced or unplaced figures--orphans, prostitutes, adventurers, etc. They thus represent or incarnate a potentially disruptive or socially unstabilized energy that may threaten, directly or implicitly, the organization of society, whether by the indeterminacy of their origin, the uncertainty of the direction in which they will focus their unbonded energy, or their attitude to the ties that hold society together and that they may choose to slight or break. . . . In particular, although the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel may be said to move toward marriage and the securing of genealogical continuity, it often gains its particular narrative urgency from an energy that threatens to contravene that stability of the family on which society depends. (3-4)

Tanner's theory of the novel also provides a context for the construction of the fallen woman in this exploration of the limits of individual freedom in a stable, productive society, where order depends on everyone's participation and acceptance of social responsibility.

When considering the importance of narrative patterns and images, the fallen woman's narrative in eighteenth-century fiction becomes a narrative strategy that comments on and enacts society's values and an author's vision. The emphasis on narrativity, on the telling a tale and its construction, is an important stylistic and thematic tool. In the case of Fielding's *Amelia*, the narratives of fallen women are a means of enacting his argument concerning morality, both social and sexual, and are not merely a vehicle for the argument. By constructing two fallen women's narratives with opposite purposes and effects, Fielding enacts the moral possibilities. This method of using an interpolated narrative as a thematic strategy is similar to what Pamela Caughie describes

as a “postmodern” strategy, which operates by “enacting, over and over again, certain ways of proceeding” and “testing out the implications” (xi-xii); unlike a postmodern approach, though, Fielding’s narrative enactments do attempt to offer a direct moral statement and do argue for one coherent vision. As John J. Richetti observes in “Women in Eighteenth-century English Literature,” an author like Fielding tried “to shape his materials toward a controlled and coherent moral purpose,” a method which can “exclude the kind of extended portrayal of women which seeks to understand their special mysteries and unique problems” (92). For this reason, the fallen woman’s narrative may become a means of exploring women’s issues but rarely serves as a radical critique of social order. The elements of resistance to society’s definition of women’s sexuality and morality do exist in the fallen woman’s narrative and in her position in the plot of the broader novel. While radical in that these challenges are articulated, the fallen woman’s narrative is conservative in its ultimate affirmation of society’s values. Reinforcement and resistance are in tension, but plot and image support elements of social order.

Fallen Women and Social Reality

As many critics so clearly demonstrate, literary constructions define and enact not only conventional images but also familiar patterns of behavior, even as they offer some challenges to existing assumptions about and definitions of women. The fallen woman’s narrative exposes and embodies the range of responses to women’s fallenness rather than a specific body of historical fact. While stories emerge from elements of social reality, stories do not necessarily correspond to social reality and should be cautiously approached as evidence of lived experience. We cannot necessarily assume that eighteenth-century literature is an exact reflection of Augustan England.

While my concern is primarily for the literary construction of the fallen woman's narrative, evidence of the historical conditions facing women in the eighteenth century suggests that the literary construction of "fallenness" did correspond to some elements of social reality. Fallen women most certainly did exist. Lawrence Stone estimates that the number of first births by unmarried mothers was as high as fifty percent in eighteenth-century England ("Illusions" 526).¹³ Although some women later married, those who did not very likely became fallen women who were abandoned by family and friends and left either to support themselves as prostitutes or mistresses or to suffer the consequences of poverty.¹⁴ In the 1750s, Magdalen House was founded to care for these women, who faced a very real struggle within a society that condemned and rejected them. Although fallen women did exist in eighteenth-century England, their lot in life very rarely corresponded to the fictions created by male and female authors alike. There most certainly were women like Moll Flanders who were maid servants seduced by their masters, but very rarely were they given the numerous opportunities Moll finds to remarry and thrive financially (although not always legally). Although elements of her story resonate with aspects of real fallen women's experience, the narrative pattern as a whole does not correlate to any individual's experience.

While myths emerge from elements of social reality, the construction of myth goes beyond social reality.¹⁵ In his study of *Society and Literature in England 1700-1760*, W.A. Speck points out the limitations of turning to literature for an exact reflection

¹³ Stone claims that the "bastardy rate" for first births rose from six to twenty percent between 1690 and 1790 (*Uncertain Unions* 17). Also, see Stone's more detailed treatment of prostitution in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*.

¹⁴ See Frank McLynn's detailed description of London prostitution in *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England*. McLynn also summarizes the limited options for unmarried pregnant women in eighteenth-century England (14).

¹⁵ Armstrong argues that literature creates that reality, asserting that "the domestic novel antedated-was indeed necessarily antecedent to-the way of life it represented" (9). Note also that definitions of "social reality" are constructs shaped by prevailing ideology.

of Augustan England and cautions that past ideology is the only historical information we can glean from literature. He suggests that literature reveals, at best, the ideological biases of its creators, which can often be seen as an ideological bias of a particular class. While I agree that ideology is an integral part of any literary construction, historical reality and personal experience also influence an author's construction of a fallen woman, just as the literary constructions influence individual attitudes and prevailing ideology.¹⁶

In his chapter titled "The Harlot's Progress" in *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, Ian Bell offers an example of the gap between literary constructions and social reality in his argument that literature conveys social ideology. Discussing the writing about crime in eighteenth-century England, Bell observes that the overwhelming concern for and writing about a crime increase does not correlate with any factual evidence.

The notion of a widespread criminal class stealthily at work throughout the land, a furtive and nefarious mirror-image of the frightened hard-working citizen, was a very potent idea in the eighteenth-century popular imagination. (15)

In making his point, Bell challenges historical estimates by arguing that there is little concrete evidence that England had an inordinate number of fallen women, even though concern for fallen women is the subject of eighteenth-century literature.¹⁷ Bell offers an additional example of the discrepancy between the numerous literary examples of "foundlings" and documented historical evidence. Although Bell's point that perception of a social problem influences literary representation as much as actual, physical reality is

¹⁶ Barbara Herrnstein Smith calls narrative a social transaction because our knowledge of lived experience is only achieved through narratives, whether historical, social, or fictional; therefore, a study of narrative aids understanding of the relationship between language, behavior, and culture. In looking at the process from an anthropological perspective, Victor Turner suggests that narratives are not only a response to social events but also a creation of rhetorical structures for future social events and future narrative enactments, resulting in a continually changing process of representing and responding.

¹⁷ McLynn cites evidence that 50% of London criminals were prostitutes.

an important one, the correlation between historical evidence cited above and literary concerns must be taken into account when considering the source and effect of a fallen woman's narrative.

While resisting the impulse to accept literary statements as social reality, Bell focuses his own analysis on trials documented in the legal, social, periodical, dramatic, and pornographic accounts of sexually compromised women. Bell's particular concern is the legal classification of women as either chaste wives or lascivious whores and the vast amount of writing expended on what he refers to as the extra-legal woman, all outside the law because of sexual crimes of fornication, adultery, prostitution, or even rape. While much of his study relates to prostitution as a crime, his analysis provides a helpful basis for understanding the ideology behind portrayals of women's sexuality in eighteenth-century discourse.

Although the fallen women that Bell locates in various discourses are quite diverse, they are constructed in legal narratives in ways that support the basic eighteenth-century assumption that the sexual woman is a threat, is at fault, or is not worthy of concern. Consistently, these women, he notes, are shown to be legally powerless and summarily condemned by the courts. In spite of such clear condemnation, Bell notes the inability of law to deal with the social problems associated with fallen women, primarily prostitution, with many writers searching for a solution outside legal action. Bell observes that literary treatment of the problem of prostitution in periodicals and novels generally blames the bawds, "male predatoriness," and women's "economically disadvantaged condition":

In fact, there is one literary feature of the Augustan period which can be identified as helping to initiate the first moves towards a less punitive approach [to the problem of prostitution]. Paradoxical though it may sound, the move away from the emphasis on "sin" as an explanation of the vast numbers of whores on the London streets towards an attempt to deal with the problem socially can be seen

in the development of a literature of individual philanthropy in the periodical essay and the early novel. (124)

The fallen woman's narrative is another embodiment of the impulse to blame circumstances as well as or instead of "sin" for a woman's fall. With a similar tone, Sir Richard Steele's *Spectator* No. 274 (1712) condemns not the poor prostitutes themselves but the deplorable schemes of the "impotent Wenchers and industrious Hags" responsible for the corruption of young women. Steele offers justification for his attack on these conspirators rather than the young women themselves:

Regard is to be had to their Circumstances when they fell, to the uneasy Perplexity under which they lived under senseless and severe Parents, to the Importunity of Poverty, to the Violence of a Passion in its Beginning well grounded, and all other Alleviations which make unhappy Women resign the Characterstick of their Sex, Modesty. To do otherwise than thus, would be to act like a pedantick Stoick, who thinks all Crimes alike, and not like an impartial SPECTATOR, who looks upon them with all the Circumstances that diminish or enhance the Guilt.

According to Bell, Steele's observations are not unique:

These periodical essays thus show a drift from a mixture of charity and embarrassment, awkwardly contained in a single piece, to a powerfully expressed righteous indignation. . . . Those women who have fallen into prostitution are beginning to be seen as victims, in need of care and attention, rather than as criminals, in need of punishment or deterrence. At this transitional stage, there remain a number of contending theories about exactly who they are victims of, about whether blame should be transferred from the whores themselves to their procuresses or to their clients. (127)

As the century progresses, the portraits of fallen women reflect more sympathy but also continued fascination mixed with disapproval.¹⁸ Novels by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding reflect a similar concern and ambivalence.¹⁹

¹⁸ See McLynn's summary of attitudes toward prostitution later in the century, where it is still considered a serious social problem.

So that readers do not get the impression that eighteenth-century discourse on fallen women was predominantly reformist or progressivist, Bell warns that most writers did not challenge the basic social structure that led to the double standard and the victimized woman.

If there was a danger for males given to whoring, it lay in the risk of contracting disease or in the long-term spiritual impoverishment For the women involved, however, things were much grimmer. They held a different status and did not enjoy immunity from prosecution. For them, as we shall see, the whole business contained material dangers and was highly illegal. According to the laws in force throughout the Augustan period, it was all their fault. (95)

As a result, women were often the target for reform as well as blame, with men being given little responsibility for the correction to the problem:

Once again, the focus of attention in the treatment of prostitution was on altering the behaviour of the woman involved, not on rectifying the society which created her, or on admonishing the men who exploited her. . . . the problem was still being formulated as a matter of gendered individual wrongdoing, of women's traditional propensity to "sin." (128)

Even the legal methods underwent some change without altering the basic assumptions of women's sexual and moral inferiority:

Although the penal strategy obviously changed during this period, from relying on corporal punishment to favouring incarceration, the thinking behind it remained profoundly paternalistic and conservative, being dependent on a pessimistic view of the possibilities of reform, and on the notion that the vicious, like the poor, might always be with us. (128-129)

In other words, the vicious and legally punishable instigators of sexual immorality were always women; no or few punishments were suggested for the profligate men.²⁰ Bell

¹⁹ See Defoe's *Some Considerations Upon StreetWalkers* (1726), which I discuss in chapter three, as well as Flynn's discussion of Richardson's fascination and disgust with fallen women in his other writing.

²⁰ McLynn describes Henry and John Fielding's mid-century efforts to alter legal treatment of seduction and to encourage punishment of seducers. Three separate bills in

observes that this conflict between the impulse to reform or revile fallen women is evident in literary portrayals which do not provide positive options for women and actually further enforce their limitations:

... artists willing to offer sustained narrative treatments of criminal women (Defoe, Haywood, Hogarth, Cleland) were able thereby to explore the nature of a woman's lot, and to offer innovative and contesting definitions of gender. But such definitions were always to some extent compromised by the "otherness" of the examined woman's illegality, which gave them an aura of the underworld, but stripped them of their power. (107)

In addition to overt classification of women by the law, the covert assumption of women's corrupt sexual nature lies at the heart of many literary representations as well. The fallen woman's narratives also contain hints of this assumption, and the narratives themselves can serve to corrupt, as in the case of Fielding's Miss Mathews, or to intrigue, as is evident in Mrs. Howe's and her friends' interest in Clarissa's tale. The ostensible purpose for a fallen woman's narrative is its didactic purpose and redemptive power, which are most evident in Mrs. Bennet's account, but Bell shows how the assumption of women's sexual corruption is reinforced by a narrative in spite of an increasing tendency to characterize women as victims of the social and sexual double standard.

In exploring the historical context for Richardson's obsession with "virgins and their fallen counterparts," Flynn also asserts that attitudes toward seduction did not directly correspond to historical evidence. Although she initially thought that Richardson's portrayal of "virtue in distress" was sensational and unrealistic, she discovered that his attitudes were common ones. Even if the literary examples of "virtue in distress" were not actually true, the assumption that they were true was very real.

1771, 1779, and 1800 attempted to make adultery and seduction legal, and not just moral, issues (97).

[A]s I began to investigate the social and historical reality of the eighteenth century, I discovered that when he seems most lurid Richardson may in truth be the most realistic. Or, more precisely, he writes realistically of a world that his readers believed to be true, using their own assumptions to authenticate his fictions. Writing to his reader, tucked safely away in the country--or, if she lived in the city, snug in her closet, the urban equivalent of paradise--Richardson warned against the monstrous evils of London, where Harriets could be kidnapped and Clarissas raped, where whores passed for ladies and rakes ruled the day. He was endorsing the communal fears and beliefs of his readers. His treatment of this material remains subversive, but the sexual stereotyping Richardson exploits in his fictions, the fallen reality he presents to be true, reflects a "reality" his readers recognized. Richardson the artist transcends the limitations of the sentimental formula while Richardson the realistic moralist exploits and develops the cultural biases and beliefs of his readers. (102)

Flynn explains the difference between historical reality and literary construction but recognizes that literary representations can very powerfully influence perception.

Flynn details some eighteenth-century assumptions about fallen women that were reinforced by the literary constructions. First, she describes the assumption that the number of prostitutes or whores in London was out of control. In the works of Richardson and others writing about prostitution at the time, Flynn finds evidence of local and foreign perception of a prostitution problem in England:

Richardson's own abhorrence of prostitutes is more easily understood when we realize that whether or not there actually were thousands of whores lining the footpaths, people of the time believed this to be the case. In London, women lived over a precipice. For Richardson, the threat of the great numbers of whores served as his moral imperative: women needed to be saved from themselves and their seducers. (104)

A second assumption was that London was a dangerous place, a threat for men and women alike, with greedy bawds, or Mother Midnights, waiting to take advantage of innocent young women newly arrived in London in order to find work (see visual representations like William Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*).²¹ As Flynn aptly

²¹ See Robert A. Erickson's *Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Eighteenth-century Fiction*.

summarizes, “The threat of seduction animated the imagination of the eighteenth century” (107). London posed a threat for males as well, and Flynn observes a third assumption that fallen women were also assumed to be ready to prey on innocent young men. She notes the inconsistency in the treatment of fallen women first as victims and then as villains:

The monstrous fallen woman (who was, we must remember, initially seduced by the monstrous male) was always abroad. Magically, the innocent victim, ravished and betrayed, had become overnight a hardened whore who delighted in ruining men. (118)

Flynn cites sources describing ways women faked their virginity, noting a 1770 act to “protect the unwary male from female predators who were not what they seemed” (119). Flynn also argues that literary representation of female corruption contributed to this construction of prostitution as a pressing problem:

Outraged Richardson, revealing his whores bereft of their paint and plumpers, and Swift, slyly enumerating the artifices in his lady’s dressing room, could be no more devastating than such a soberly worded list of outlawed artifices. (120)

In assessing the many different treatments of fallen women, Flynn observes the many contradictions: “Determining the eighteenth-century attitude towards the fallen woman becomes complicated when we encounter so many versions of the truth” (120).

Whether revealing fears about women’s sexuality, the social limits of women’s roles, or an economic or moral challenge to the aristocracy, the fallen woman’s narrative is a literary construct that was informed by and influenced its social context. Although the fallen woman’s narrative cannot be examined as evidence of a specific social reality in eighteenth-century England, its images, narrative patterns, and themes reveal assumptions about and shape potential reactions to women who were sexually compromised. Beyond the issue of the relationship between literary and social

constructions lies the question of how the fallen woman's narrative relates to an author's own novelistic effort. In the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, the fallen woman's narrative is a tool used in Defoe's characterization, Richardson's narrative style, and Fielding's theme.

CHAPTER 3
DEFOE'S "AMOROUS CHAIN OF STORY":
THE FALLEN WOMAN'S NARRATIVE IN
MOLL FLANDERS AND *ROXANA*

In the preface to *Moll Flanders*, Daniel Defoe defends the value of the supposed autobiography of a renowned thief and whore by arguing that the didactic message outweighs any titillation the realistic details might provide. The models of penitence and cautions against vice provide "more real Beauty in them than all the amorous Chain of Story which introduces it" (39). While Defoe offers his didactic purpose to justify the realistic account of wickedness and corruption detailed on the title page, he clearly recognizes that his burgeoning middle-class audience will be attracted to Moll's more scandalous adventures. The narrative structure, the "amorous Chain of Story," is the vehicle for introducing moral lessons, or so Defoe would have his reader accept. Yet Defoe's own acknowledgment of the power of narrative to engage his audience provides an important insight into his narrative technique in both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. Although these novels are episodic and lack tightly constructed plots, they draw on the power of "Story," a term that in this context suggests the self-conscious arrangement of events into an engaging narrative structure.¹ Defoe's reference to the "amorous Chain of

¹Although some narrative theorists use the term "story" to designate the facts or events preceding the construction of narrative (story vs. discourse), the term here suggests the presence of a familiar narrative structure (as in, "Tell me a story."). As edited autobiographies, both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* derive function and form from the act of constructing meaningful stories from the random events of their lives. This particular

Story” indicates the presence of a particular narrative structure, the fallen woman’s narrative, which is at the core of his plot and characterization in both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. Although the fallen woman’s narrative is the initial episode of each novel, Defoe complicates this paradigm in subsequent episodes with his own complex portrayal of female sexuality and survival.

While Moll and Roxana are clearly fallen women, little critical attention has been given to the presence of a fallen woman’s narrative in Defoe’s characterization and narrative structure in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, even though the account of Moll’s and Roxana’s initial fall is patterned like other fallen women’s narratives. In each case, although Defoe examines different outcomes of the women’s choices, he begins with sexual fallenness to establish each character’s vulnerability and powerlessness. Both stories contain conventional elements of the fallen woman’s narrative: self-characterization as exceptional and vulnerable, explanation of circumstances leading to vulnerability, the seducer’s deception or manipulation, limited options after the seduction, and the lesson derived from the tale.² But the fact that orphaned Moll is seduced by her master and abandoned Roxana sleeps with her landlord is not the most significant element of Defoe’s opening scenes. Defoe’s emphasis on narrativity, the first-person narrator and her attempts to justify for her audience the causes of her fall, reveals his use of the particular “Story” structure found in the fallen woman’s narrative.

passage from the preface is just one of the many sections that emphasize the distinction between the events of each woman’s life and the form into which they have been shaped.

² Various critics have noted some of these elements in Defoe’s work but characterize them as part of different genres, not noting the particular features of the fallen woman’s narrative. In *Daniel Defoe: Ambition and Innovation*, Paula R. Backscheider examines *Roxana* in the context of what she calls the “woman’s novels” (183), novels by and about women earlier in the century which contain similar didacticism found in fallen women’s narratives. See also sources cited above, particularly Ian Bell’s *Defoe’s Fiction* and *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, on the genres which share characteristics I identify in the fallen woman’s narrative.

Defoe's distinction between the appeal of a "Story" and benefit of moral observations is important for the didactic goals of his "histories." Whether Defoe achieves his stated didactic purpose is questionable, as is Moll's and Roxana's penitence. Rather than enter into that familiar debate, I would like to focus on Defoe's concern for the narrative structure of Moll's and Roxana's confessional texts, the "Chain of Story" they use to construct their lives for their audience. I argue that Defoe's use of the conventions of the fallen woman's narrative in the opening episode of each novel is an important part of his larger fictional efforts in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. Once the fallen woman's narrative is used to characterize Moll and Roxana as sympathetic fallen women, Defoe moves beyond the initial portrait of them as fallen women to a more complex and challenging portrait and narrative. What in the fallen woman's narrative is a predictable portrayal of the seducer's machinations and the fallen woman's guilt becomes in the broader narrative a surprisingly elaborate representation of each woman's reactions to seductions far more subtle and morally complex than the initial sexual conflict. In analyzing the fallen woman's narrative as an important initial narrative technique in these novels, I outline many of the basic features of the fallen woman's narrative.

That Defoe does not follow precisely any specific genre for the structure of his novels is critical commonplace, although many critics point to some of the forms he adapts for *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*: the criminal biography, spiritual autobiography, secret histories, or scandalous chronicles.³ What becomes clear in the preface to both

³ Although other critics have not identified the particular features I identify as the fallen woman's narrative in the opening of these two novels, many critics have considered Defoe's novels in relationship to other genres of the period. Michael M. Boardman, in *Defoe and the Uses of Narrative*, is concerned with Defoe's narrative techniques and experiments, particularly in relationship to critical notions of a "traditional novel," definitions which he suggests are imposed upon Defoe's work. He argues that Defoe's full-length fictional prose work emerges from several narrative traditions and reveals various narrative strategies which only come close to the novelistic

novels is that Defoe knowingly utilizes multiple narrative structures in the episodes that constitute the autobiography of these two women.⁴ Although Lincoln B. Faller does not consider the fallen woman's narrative in *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing*, he observes Defoe's awareness of audience in his use of genres popular in the early eighteenth-century, arguing that Defoe's audience's expectations for reading *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* would have been shaped by the criminal biography. By detailing the narrative levels and the effects on the reader as Defoe presents them in the preface to *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, I hope to explore the way the fallen woman's narrative can also influence his readers.

Defoe is very aware of the potential impact of his novels on readers, both as lurid tales of wickedness and didactic tales of repentance. For all the protestations of the prefaces, he is clearly aware that the story has more appeal than the lesson and utilizes

form in the ending of *Roxana*. Boardman concludes that Defoe's efforts at using different types of narratives are significant to the development of prose narrative and contribute to the possibilities seen in later traditional novels.

In *Defoe's Fiction*, Bell argues that Defoe's novels should be seen as a part of the popular literary tradition of the first part of the eighteenth century. In examining *Moll Flanders*, he considers its relationship to the criminal biography and Defoe's interest in social issues, noting that Defoe places more emphasis on character than other examples of criminal biography do. *Roxana* emerges from what he calls scandal fiction, but Defoe's use of the tragic mode, causality, and characterization make it more literary than popular.

In "Criminal Ms-Representation: *Moll Flanders* and Female Criminal Biography," John Rietz's discussion agrees with Boardman's classification of *Moll Flanders* as a criminal biography, but he looks particularly to conventions he finds in two female criminal biographies, Francis Kirkman's *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* (1673) and *Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* (anon. 1662). He notes that, unlike male criminals, female criminals' resistance to social boundaries and categories is portrayed through their sexuality, with their defiance relayed through uncertain male/female identity and through perverse sexual relationships. See also Philip Rawlings' *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* for an interesting review of criminal biographies.

⁴ See Boardman's *Defoe and the Uses of Narrative*, John J. Richetti's *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures*, and Everett Zimmerman's *Defoe and the Novel* on Defoe's use of episodic structure.

both elements in his work. The fallen woman's narrative in the opening episode establishes his effort to engage interest from and instruct his reader. In *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures*, John J. Richetti notes *Roxana's* link to the "chronique scandaleuse," where a heroine successfully moves into the upper class as a courtesan, and to the secret histories of popular fiction in the early eighteenth century. Many of these narrative patterns combine the titillating and didactic in the same way that the fallen woman's narrative does:

Innocent readers are invited to watch as such decadence and its thrilling results grow inevitably out of the social conditions of this stylized world: infinite leisure, sexual permissiveness and/or unlimited sexual opportunity, and unrestricted political and social combat. These same readers not only enjoy that exotic world of forbidden pleasures and achievements but are located by their relation as readers to such a world in the classless moralism needed to judge it. (193-4)

The title pages themselves indicate that Defoe is using the appeal of the scandalous in his novels: the title page of *Moll Flanders* mentions Newgate, Whoring, incest, thieving and transportation; that of *Roxana* contains the subtitle "The Fortunate Mistress." Although Defoe claims to be telling these tales for moral profit, he recognizes that tales of wickedness and the "amorous Chain of Story" will attract the reader.

Through the fallen woman's narrative, Defoe not only attracts his readers but also explores the broader social context for and morality of Moll's and Roxana's subsequent choices. In presenting the limiting social circumstances (economic, moral, and spiritual) women face, Defoe utilizes a narrative structure that embodies women's powerlessness, the seduction plot.⁵ But he places that seduction plot within the overall structure of the

⁵ See Bell and Jane Flanders on the seduction plot common in the early eighteenth century. Feminist critics of eighteenth-century fiction detail the social limitations both Moll and Roxana face as women. In "Defoe's Women: Snares and Prey," Backscheider discusses Defoe's emphasis on the forces, particularly social, that limit Moll's and Roxana's options as women in the late seventeenth century.

In "'A Woman on Her Own Account,'" Miriam Lerenbaum argues that Defoe does little to free Moll from standard feminine restrictions and the crisis points in the

fallen woman's narrative, the narrative circumstances in which a fallen woman is allowed to explain her situation. In this narrative paradigm, the motive for and effect of the story are more important than the seduction itself. By having Moll and Roxana portray themselves as sympathetic fallen women, Defoe shifts the focus from her fall to her response to her fallen condition.

Following this initial portrait of Moll and Roxana as sympathetic fallen women, Defoe focuses on the way each woman responds to her fallenness. For Defoe, with his interest in exploring individuals making choices and dealing with the circumstances that life, God, and society offer them, the fallen woman's narrative offers a unique combination of the woman-character as the passive victim of seduction and the woman-narrator with the necessary power to respond morally to her circumstances. By telling her own story with the conventions of the fallen woman's narrative, each woman has an opportunity to influence her audience's understanding of her fall and make her own redemption and reintegration into society possible. Although each woman can justify her life by characterizing herself as a sympathetic fallen woman through the fallen woman's narrative, her claims of morality are not enough. Her subsequent actions determine the possibilities for her final position in society. Even as Defoe examines social issues that emerge from the conflict of a woman surviving within and against the social order that restricted her in the first place, he judges each woman's morality according to her actions and not her rhetoric. In the process of presenting an initially sympathetic fallen woman

narrative are unique to women, both in the plights Moll faces and the responses she offers.

Sudesh Vaid's *The Divided Mind: Studies in Defoe and Richardson* is an early feminist study based on the assumption that sex roles in any society are politically based. In her first chapter, she provides an excellent summary of the economic, educational, and social conditions for eighteenth-century women.

In "The Harlot's Progress in Eighteenth-century England," William A. Speck looks at the social limitations that led women into prostitution in the eighteenth century and at the development of Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes in 1758. See also Shirlene Mason on *Daniel Defoe and the Status of Women*.

who continues to act immorally, Defoe constructs a complex and sometimes contradictory image of the sexual woman as both victim and villain, penitent and prostitute, initially innocent but ultimately guilty of moral corruption.⁶ As Defoe critiques society's unfair treatment of a sexual woman, he offers his own construction of what such a woman's final role should be. Regardless of the language and narrative structures a woman uses to characterize her moral status, she is responsible for reacting morally to circumstances.

The fallen woman's narrative allows both Moll and Roxana to justify their situations and address the social as well as moral influences on their actions. Moll uses the elements of the fallen woman's narrative to elicit a sympathetic response from her readers and also to align herself with the middle-class morality that judges her as fallen. Through this narrative and subsequent moral observations in the novel, Moll claims a moral position she desires, but her actions repeatedly contradict those claims. In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe shows that, while society sets the rules for survival which place females at a disadvantage, a woman is capable of using those rules to her advantage, particularly when her tactics are immoral. Moll's ability to adapt becomes the focus of the book, and, while Moll's confession offers a context for assessing her morality, the editor and the reader base their judgment on her actions. Defoe's use of the fallen woman's narrative in *Moll Flanders* demonstrates the hollowness of rhetoric. Claims to morality must be supported by action.

⁶ Some critics are intrigued by Defoe's exploration of female sexual transgressions while assuming the narrative voice of a woman. In *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, Madeleine Kahn argues that male authors who adopt female narrators transgress gender categories, examine their validity, and define them even as they assume a specific gendered perspective. In her chapter on *Roxana*, Kahn suggests that assuming Roxana's voice allows Defoe to explore female consciousness as "other" as long as he is comfortable and then to pull back from that consciousness in the end.

Moll's self-accusations and moral observations are a nod to the middle-class values she aspires to but never acts upon or is punished by. Unlike Moll, Roxana truly believes and internalizes society's condemnation of an unchaste woman. Having been raised in the middle class, Roxana believes the values that shaped her position in life. Although she uses the fallen woman's narrative to justify her fall and elicit sympathy for her situation, she also uses it to condemn herself and explain how her guilt and sense of degradation inspire further evil. While never publicly exposed as a mistress and courtesan, Roxana privately suffers for her sense of guilt. In *Roxana*, Defoe demonstrates more directly that a woman's choice to adapt to circumstances may have serious consequences. To this end, Defoe develops Roxana's more sophisticated self-analysis throughout the text. In many scenes, Roxana's assessment of her behavior is more significant than the action itself. Although originally shown to be a victim like Moll, Roxana is given more responsibility for her actions because of her increased self-awareness. In his final novel, Defoe moves from primarily economic and social concerns to the moral and psychological status of the individual.

In order to achieve his purpose, Defoe initially shapes audience reaction to Moll and Roxana as fallen women, with the standard elements found in the fallen woman's narrative. Although victims of society's limitations on women, Moll and Roxana are given ideal feminine traits, such as beauty and intelligence, that could ensure their place in society if they behave appropriately. This combination of admirable quality and fearful vulnerability actually make them appear more powerless. At the conclusion of the opening narrative episode, Defoe moves beyond this simple character type to create very complicated female characters who go far beyond the role of victim.

In addition to characterizing herself as exceptional and vulnerable, the narrator of a fallen woman's narrative also constructs a plot in which she is the object, not the agent, of the action. In much literature about fallen women, even accounts that do not have the

fallen woman telling her own story in the form of a fallen woman's narrative, the assessment of a fallen woman's culpability is directly related to her position as object or agent of her fall.⁷ The first determination of the fallen woman as an agent or object is her role in the initiation of the seduction itself. Is the fallen woman a passive victim or an active temptress? Once fallen, a second determination of a fallen woman's agency can be made by examining her power of choice in dealing with her fallenness. Do external forces act upon her to determine her alternatives (society, seducer, circumstances), or does she have power to act independently? Finally, the third determination must be made by considering the resolution. How does the fallen woman ultimately come to terms with her situation? In some cases, I have found that the fallen woman remains a victim of social standards even after relaying her story. As penitents, some fallen women redeem their fallen status through religious self-sacrifice, although they always remain tainted and inferior. In other cases, the only alternative for a fallen woman is death, which can be seen as an escape but evidence that a fallen woman has no acceptable place in society. Often, if society's reaction to her fallenness does not completely thwart her options, as in the case of Mrs. Bennet, she may be given some possibilities to become an active moral agent. This type of fallen woman is capable of making choices to pursue a productive life.

⁷ While the literary texts with fallen women are numerous and impossible to list here, modern readers may be familiar with some famous novels about fallen women: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Elizabeth Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. In addition to this incomplete list are novels in which fallen women play a minor role and numerous less familiar novels within the body of women's literature. While the structural components of these plots remain fairly consistent (initiation, judgment, alternatives), an author's construction of each woman's agency varies greatly. It is important to note that a narrative including a fallen woman is not the same as a fallen woman's narrative, where the opportunity for a woman to tell her own story to a specific audience is central to the motive for and effect of the narrative.

More often, though, as in the case of Moll and Roxana, the opportunity for choice still leads to the roles of mistress, bawd, or courtesan. As Roxana's path demonstrates, the attempt to escape fallenness through deception may offer financial opportunities but with the possibility of even more severe emotional consequences. Within the fallen woman's narrative itself, though, the fallen woman is conventionally portrayed as the victim, whether or not the broader context for her tale supports that.

Moll Flanders and *Roxana* offer a particularly interesting example of the fallen woman's negotiation between her role as object and agent. Most fallen women are characterized as vulnerable objects of seduction, and Moll and Roxana open their narratives with similar self-characterizations through a detailed account of circumstances, particularly the conditions and motives that leave them vulnerable as well as the unique physical and personality traits that make them appealing. In both Moll's and Roxana's plotting of the narrative, this characterization establishes their innocence in the initial seduction and reveals the seducer's deception. Defoe begins with this narrative position for his characters but quickly complicates it in the remaining narrative.

Even though both women acknowledge some responsibility for their fallen condition, their alternatives are limited by their compromised sexuality. The way those alternatives influence the remainder of their lives is the third key aspect of the fallen woman's narrative that Defoe utilizes. For Defoe, although each woman has been clearly victimized by the circumstances she faces and although her options as a fallen woman are limited, each woman's choice of how to live with her fallenness becomes the key to her moral success or failure. Although initially objects of seduction, Moll and Roxana become agents in subsequent episodes as they move beyond their victim status and aggressively pursue options other than immediate penitence. Moll's fall is a minor element in her overall journey and only one of the many limited choices with which she is faced. In Moll's case, her choices lead to an active life of crime that results in

imprisonment and transportation to America. Only in her final role as wife and penitent can she find security in society (and even that position is thrown into question by doubts of her sincerity which are presented as early as the preface). Roxana's fall has a more lasting impact on all her subsequent choices and behavior. She chooses to continue to be a mistress and courtesan and to do whatever she must to hide her true identity. Her final desperate acts to ward off any threat to her security, including the suggestion that she has her own daughter murdered, ultimately condemn her more completely than her sexual fallenness ever did. These self-conscious choices lead to the novel's abrupt tragic ending. As each woman moves from object of seduction to agent of her own responses to her fallenness, she is given more responsibility for the choices she makes and greater condemnation, whether external or internal, and her moral status becomes more complex.

When moving beyond the characterization and plot of the fallen woman's narrative, Defoe also complicates audience responses. Sympathy alone for the fallen woman is not enough, but neither is simplistic condemnation. Readers must assess morality from a complex portrait of moral dilemmas. In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe explores how far Moll's agency, or "unwearied industry," can take her, but sustains his social critique by emphasizing the social limitations she faces (41). Yet Moll's moral position in relation to these limitations is ambiguous. As the narrator, she determines the extent to which she will reveal or conceal her motives and actions. Her final successful return to England suggests a possible reintegration of a confessed fallen woman into society, but such a conclusion is complicated by the reader's uncertainty about her sincerity.

Although more consistently successful than Moll, Roxana's final situation, abruptly incomplete as it is, suggests a fate more tragic than Moll's. Like Moll, Roxana is faced with limited options as a woman. Unlike Moll, Roxana does not repeatedly face financial ruin. Rather, her battle becomes an emotional and psychological one. After

using the basic structure of the fallen woman's narrative to establish the social limitations Roxana faces, Defoe provides Roxana with a financial stability that shifts the focus of the novel from choices for survival to choices of security. Although temporarily "flourishing and outwardly happy" at the end of the novel (285), Roxana states in her final words that great misery precedes her final repentance. In *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, the fallen woman's narrative exposes the limits of the social realities and reinforces the strengths of social ideals. In developing Moll and Roxana beyond their initial self-characterization as fallen women, Defoe portrays a woman's struggle for survival and the complex moral questions raised by the ambiguities of that struggle.

In the following sections, I will analyze in more detail Defoe's handling of the fallen woman's narrative in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. First, I will place Defoe's handling of the fallen woman's narrative in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* within a broader context of his own and his society's ambivalence toward fallen women. In an analysis of his fiction, I will detail his concern for episodic structure and moral purpose as presented in each novel's preface. Second, I will examine his characterization of Moll and Roxana as potential fallen women because of their vulnerability and uniqueness. In the structure of each narrative, I will show how Defoe elicits audience sympathy by presenting each woman as the powerless victim of her seducer's desire and an object in the fallen woman's plot. Finally, I will explore how each woman's attempt to regain some power over her life at the conclusion of these initial episodes actually results in condemnation.

The Wicked Victim: the Context for Ambivalence

Defoe is not alone in his ambivalence toward sexual women, an ambivalence which is particularly evident in the debates over the problem of prostitution in the early part of the century. In addition to focusing two novels in two years on the subject of fallen women, Defoe wrote an essay called *Some Considerations Upon Streetwalkers*

(1726), in which he considers the causes of London's perceived problem with prostitution. Although written after *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, this essay provides an important context for considering the fallen woman's narrative in Defoe's earlier fiction. Defoe's purpose in the essay is to identify the circumstances that force young women into prostitution, but he cannot avoid revealing his antipathy toward and condemnation of prostitutes. The title page contains the following quotation:

Keep thy Eyes from wand'ring, Man of Frailty; Beware the dang'rous Beauty of the Wanton; Fly their Inticements, Ruin like a Vulture Waits on their Steps.

Words like "Wanton," "Vulture," and "Inticements" confirm the assumption that prostitutes are innately equipped to bring about a man's downfall, just like the first temptress Eve. Prostitutes are characterized as active agents of seduction, unlike the women of the fallen woman's narrative who are clearly objects. In describing the circumstances which make the problem of prostitution intolerable in London, Defoe offers revealing characterizations of prostitutes. He relates not being able to walk through town without being blocked by some "audacious Harlot, whose impudent Leer shewd she only stopp'd my Passage in order to draw my observation on her" or being hailed by the "lewd and ogling Salutations" of others (2). He states later that the "living Set [of prostitutes] are past Redemption," and the only hope for reducing their growing numbers is to prevent new prostitutes from falling into the trade (5). The sympathy for the plight of fallen women evident in the opening scene of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* does not extend to their behavior after they continue their immoral behavior.

Although Defoe's initial description of prostitution appears to place all the responsibility on the women, his primary thesis is that men are the cause of the problem. He blames the "Neglect of Matrimony which the Morals of the present Age inspire Men with" (6). Men concerned only with their fortunes delay marriage and rely on prostitutes

and mistresses for sexual satisfaction. Women are “forced to *become the Instruments* [emphasis mine] of satisfying those Desires in Men which were given for a better Use, and which are the greatest Temptations to Matrimony” (7). In this argument, Defoe characterizes prostitutes as passive victims of a social structure where “Man’s Solicitation tempts them [young women] to Lewdness, Necessity succeeds Sin, and Want puts an End to Shame” (8). At the same time, this analysis does not free a fallen woman from the assumption that she is “a Nuisance to the Good, a Snare to the Innocent, and a Triumph to the Wicked” (2). The seduced woman is still labeled a seductress in a society that cannot forgive a woman who has lost her virtue. Even though Defoe places some responsibility on men, he still holds women accountable for their immoral actions and urges very severe punishment:

Let the Whipping-Post, Work-House, and Transportation, be employ’d to dissipate the present Set of Street-Walking Strumpets; and let us by gentler Allurements to Virtue, destroy the Hope of any Succession of such miserable Sinners. (8)

While still innocent, young women can be treated sympathetically. Having abandoned virtue, the existing prostitutes (victims or not) are irredeemable, “miserable Sinners.”

In contrast to the harshness of his opening condemnation of prostitutes, Defoe also cites the social limitations that leave women few alternatives for survival. Defoe even utilizes a character reminiscent of Roxana and Moll when he concludes his essay with a letter from a woman who, seduced and abandoned by a gentleman, waits in Newgate to be hanged for pickpocketing, a career she took up after prostitution. In the first-person account structured as a fallen woman’s narrative, Defoe utilizes the young woman’s poverty, seduction, and abandonment as the cause of her life of crime and corruption. Whether the letter is fiction or fact, the young woman presents herself as both victim and sinner. She is not responsible for her financial helplessness and her seducer’s deception. At the same time, she bears the burden of her guilt and sees death as the only

fitting punishment. Defoe ends this brief narrative by eliciting our sympathy for these poor fallen women as much as he did our revulsion for the lascivious whores in the opening of the piece. Defoe's ambivalence, his sympathy for women who have been forced by circumstances to such desperate action and his condemnation of women who have chosen that path, is the same pattern he utilizes in his novels about fallen women.

By writing about prostitution or fallen women, Defoe joined his contemporaries in confronting what was considered a serious social problem. Although often lightly dismissed as the "oldest profession," prostitution in early eighteenth-century England was perceived as a threat to physical health and a moral danger to the family structure. The increase in prostitution is the subject of much writing in the early eighteenth century.⁸ Periodicals and essays addressing the issue reveal conflicting views not unlike Defoe's. Some writers dismiss the women, provocatively or maliciously, as "whores," while others consider them victims of society's double standard for men and women. Those sharing Defoe's concern for the treatment of prostitutes also speak out against the brutal and fruitless methods used for legal control of prostitution. In addition to inflicting punishments such as the whipping post, prison, and workhouses, the Society for the Suppression of Vice tried to close down brothels and clear the streets of prostitutes (Stone 617). Bernard Mandeville's 1724 pamphlet, *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, attacks these methods of "reforming" prostitutes:

[I]t would not be amiss, if you chang'd somewhat your present Method of Conversion, especially in the Article of Whipping. . . . the Stripping of her Naked, may, for aught I know, contribute to Her Modesty, and put Her in a state of Innocence; but surely, Gentlemen, You must all know, that Flogging has a quite contrary Effect. (x-xi)

⁸ See Speck's "The Harlot's Progress" where he details the popular debate and efforts to address the problem of prostitution in the eighteenth century. Frank McLynn also reviews this debate in *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England*.

Mandeville's satirical pamphlet suggests that making brothels legal and sanitary is the only way to eliminate the common problems of venereal disease, men seducing unprotected women, and women murdering or abandoning bastard infants (Stone 617). In his essay and his novels, Defoe also calls for public recognition of the seriousness of this social problem.

Accounts which recognize a prostitute's miserable existence were frequently countered by characterizations of prostitutes who enjoyed and pursued their life because of their innate wantonness, an assumption which Defoe disproves through the use of the fallen woman's narrative in his fiction. In the *London Spy*, several articles accuse prostitutes of going into the occupation knowingly and exaggerating their claims of being seduced (Cummings 44, 45). Dorothea Cummings notes that treatments of the problem by women writers were often scathingly hostile, and *The Spectator* even blames women for their lack of pity on the fallen women as victims (49). Public hostility was particularly strong against the bawds or madams who ran the brothels. Lawrence Stone provides an account of a famous London madam, Mrs. Elizabeth Needham, who in 1731 was put in the pillory where she was stoned so severely that she died several days later (619). The *Grub Street Journal* ironically comments on society's double standard by observing that the crowd "acted very ungratefully, considering how much she had done to oblige them" (Stone 619). Although Defoe seems fully aware of this double standard and exposes the problem in his writing, he does not fail to judge prostitution directly and indirectly.

Both Defoe's sympathetic and condemnatory views are shared by periodical writers in the early eighteenth century. According to T.G.A. Nelson, Defoe's need to moralize and sympathize has parallels in the libertine literature and emerging pornography of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Nelson evaluates contradictory attitudes towards prostitutes in what he calls "whore-texts" and discovers

that most early eighteenth-century English writers could not treat “the pleasures of whoring without at the same time alluding to its pains, disappointments, shortcomings, or baneful consequences” (181). Nelson calls this the “deft backflip by which the whore-text reverses itself and becomes a religious or penitential text” (184). While Defoe does not overtly write his novels in the tradition of libertine literature, the similarity of his moral judgment suggests a common pattern in works addressing prostitution in the early eighteenth century.

In many ways, *Some Considerations* offers a compressed version of the ambivalence towards fallen women which is evident in both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. In his non-fiction as well as his fiction, Defoe represents the causes and conditions of fallen women, but he ultimately condemns rather than supports these victimized women.

The Preface and the Power of Narrative

The prefaces to *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* contain clear evidence of Defoe’s awareness of the narrative structures he is utilizing and of the various interpretations his readers may have. As with many Defoe writings, the narrative voice in each preface is not necessarily his own. Therefore, I will refer to the narrators as the editors of each woman’s story, because each writer clearly states his responsibility in “dressing up” each woman’s narrative to make it more readable. In each preface, the editor’s distinction between his narrative, Moll’s and Roxana’s narratives, and the actual events of their lives serves to highlight the role of narrative construction on the final effect any “Story” has. This prefatory emphasis on narrative provides an important basis for the narrativity that is central to a fallen woman’s narrative, the awareness of the way events are structured for a particular purpose. The discussion of the power of narrative in each preface establishes

the context for Defoe's own strategy of utilizing multiple narrative structures in his broader text.

Although both prefaces highlight the process of narrative construction, they differ primarily in each editor's attitude toward each woman's original tale. In *Moll Flanders*, the editor explains the need for his revisions of Moll's original tale:

It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language more like one still in *Newgate*, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be. (37)

Because of the origin and extent of Moll's corruption, the editor is actually faced with a very difficult job: "an Author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage" (38). Because of this potentially destructive effect on readers, the editor clarifies his influence on content as well as style, noting that "some of the vicious part of her Life, which cou'd not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other Parts are very much shortn'd" (38). In this lengthy preface, the editor repeats this basic premise, that Moll's story is so corrupt and the potential danger to the reader so serious, that he must compensate with his own editorial choices, ones perhaps that Moll would not or could not have offered herself. In addition to establishing the reader's suspicion of Moll's own tale, this prefatory introduction of an "editor" of Moll's first-person narrative confirms the different levels of narrative control and emphasizes the influences that shape the story itself.

In "Retelling Moll's Story: the Editor's Preface to *Moll Flanders*," Larry L. Langford argues that Defoe creates a double narrative that builds inconsistency of purpose into the main narrative by introducing the editor's critical attitude toward Moll's version of the story. Langford suggests that Defoe structures this external perspective into the preface to influence the way the reader perceives the text, creating distance

between the reader and Moll because she survives without adhering to middle-class morality. Langford feels the preface is “alerting us to the screen or filter that has been placed between Moll and her readers in order to make us understand her according to criteria that are not her own” (173). Although I do not agree with Langford’s radical separation of the editor’s voice from Moll’s voice within the broader narrative, I do agree that the preface draws attention to the multiple narrative levels and narrativity, the selection of events for a particular audience that is central to the fallen woman’s narrative.

Unlike Moll’s editor, Roxana’s editor admires Roxana, her tale, and the moral she is able to supply on her own, stating from the beginning that the “history of this beautiful lady is to speak for itself” (v). He also distinguishes between his efforts and Roxana’s but cites her effort as superior to his own:

[i]f all the most diverting parts of it are not adapted to the instruction and improvement of the reader, the relator says it must be from the defect of his performance; dressing up the story in worse clothes than the lady, whose words he speaks, prepared for the world. (v)

One begins to wonder why a “relator” and “dressing up” are necessary at all. Unlike Moll’s editor, who claims that her story could never be presented without the editor’s language and editing, Roxana’s editor stresses the power of her own style, particularly her self reproach:

In the manner she has told the story, [emphasis mine] it is evident she does not insist upon her justification in any one part of it; much less does she recommend her conduct, or, indeed, any part of it, except her repentance, to our imitation. On the contrary, she makes frequent excursions in a just censuring and condemning her own practice. How often does she reproach herself in the most passionate manner and guide us to just reflections in the like cases! (vi)

The editor gives Roxana the credit for the most effective aspects of the narrative. In spite of his admiration for Roxana and her *own* story, the editor still notes briefly the need for his own editing, offering that “all imaginable care has been taken to keep clear of indecencies and immodest expressions” (vi). Although still revealing the layers of

narrative influence, Defoe's preface to *Roxana* places more authority in Roxana's own voice, a decision that further highlights her moral responsibility as well.

As each editor establishes the multiple narrative layers to be found in the subsequent narrative, he also distinguishes between the events and the self-conscious selection of and comment on events, an element of narrativity common in the fallen woman's narrative. Roxana's editor argues that "[t]he noble inferences that are drawn from this one part are worth all the rest of the story, and abundantly justify, as they are the professed design of, the publication" (vi). The "Story" very often contains what he calls "wicked action," which the requirements of history demand be related as truthfully as possible. Moll's editor justifies in more detail the importance of including the morally questionable "Story":

To give the History of a wicked Life repented of, necessarily requires that the wicked Part should be made as wicked as the real History of it will bear, to illustrate and give a Beauty to the Penitent part, which is certainly the best and brightest, if related with equal Spirit and Life. (38)

Moll's editor clearly distinguishes, as does Roxana's editor, between two levels of narrative: the actual events themselves or the "real History," and the moral observations on those events. The role of the editor is to make the "wicked Part" wicked and the "Penitent part" beautiful. In discussing what the reader should take from the history, the editor advises the following: "it is to be hop'd that such Readers will be much more pleas'd with the Moral than the Fable, with the Application than with the Relation, and with the End of the Writer than with the Life of the Person written of" (38-39). Similarly Roxana's editor offers a caution to the reader to make moral use of the "Story": "But when vice is painted in its low-prized colours, 'tis not to make people in love with it, but to expose it; and if the reader makes a wrong use of the figures, the wickedness is his own" (vi). The editors' distinctions between event and interpretation indicate multiple narrative layers. Langford also notes the double narrative of the novel and the multiple

narrators: the story itself (“the Fable”) and the moral to be taken from it, Moll’s experience and the editor’s adaptations of it (171). Langford’s argument supports my assertion that the preface establishes reader awareness of the various narrative structures and strategies utilized in the construction of Moll’s and Roxana’s tales. Each has a particular focus or structure that the editors, or presumably Moll and Roxana, have used to relate the random events of their lives.

The editors also admit that readers will find various episodes or interpolated narratives like the “amorous Chain of Story.” The editor speaking in the preface to *Moll Flanders* notes that “[t]here is in this Story abundance of delightful Incidents, and all of them usefully apply’d” (39). He also clarifies that each episode has been structured by the editor for reader interest and instruction: “There is an agreeable turn Artfully given them in the relating, that naturally Instructs the Reader either one way or other” (39). While he cautions that the book is for “those who know how to Read it, and how to make the good Uses of it,” he clearly indicates that his role as narrator has allowed him to select and construct the episodes. Each editor’s concern for different narrative patterns demonstrates the power of narrative to shape experience into understanding, as well as the tendency to utilize a particular narrative structure for the benefit of the audience.

A notable narrative structure employed by Defoe is the seduction plot, which lies at the heart of the fallen woman’s narrative. After indicating the many episodes that make up the work, the editor cites two examples, Moll’s seduction by the elder brother in Colchester and her affair with her Bath lover, indicating the editor’s awareness of a subgenre of “wicked Parts,” narratives related to the sexual politics of the time, particularly to seduction. In this context, he refers to the “amorous Chain of Story,” or the self-conscious construction of events into the shape of a narrative, which is a necessary and appealing part of his text. As much as he argues that these two episodes

provide evidence for sound moral lessons, his description of each scene emphasizes their structure and pattern:

The first part of her lewd Life with the young Gentleman at Colchester has so many *happy Turns given it to expose the Crime, and warn* all whose Circumstances are adapted to it, of the ruinous End of such things, and the foolish Thoughtless and abhorr'd Conduct of both the Parties, that it abundantly atones for all the lively Discription she gives of her Folly and Wickedness. (39)
[emphasis mine]

Defoe draws attention to the self-conscious structuring of events into narrative with phrases that indicate structure (“happy Turns”), purpose (“to expose the Crime, and warn”), and style (“lively Discription”). Also, the editor’s reference to the “amorous” scenes, particularly those dealing with love and vice, will possibly be even more attractive to the reader. For that reason, the editor has added an emphasis on the “Repentance” and “just Caution” and corrected all the “Levity and Looseness that was in it: So it is all applied, and with the utmost care, to virtuous and religious Uses” (39).

The use of narrative layers and episodes is a fictional strategy Defoe repeats in *Roxana*. Roxana’s editor also claims the truthfulness of the tale and even the need for names being changed because the “scene is laid so near the place where the main part of it was transacted” (v). This claim to the truth is important, although again, the distinction between actual events and how they have been structured for telling is accentuated when the editor distinguishes between the “pleasure” and the “profit” of such stories (v). The editor acknowledges different parts of the tale, some of which have been verified as truth by actual people and others which cannot be verified but are assumed to be true. The first part about being abandoned by her husband is verified by the editor himself when he claims to know Roxana’s first husband personally.

In addition to an emphasis on the narrative levels, each editor is also concerned with the effect of these stories on readers. And in this sense, Defoe asserts that narrative shapes reader behavior. Both editors claim that readers will gain instruction as well as

pleasure. Moll's editor only wants those "who know how to Read it, and how to make the good Uses of it" to actually take the story to heart; he is aware that it is tempting for "vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage" (38). He states more clearly:

Upon this Foundation this Book is recommended to the Reader, as a Work from every part of which something may be learned, and some just and religious Inference is drawn, by which the Reader will have something of Instruction, if he pleases to make use of it. (40)

Roxana's editor also recognizes multiple interpretations but hopes that readers "will find nothing to prompt a vicious mind, but everywhere much to discourage and expose it"

(vi). The narrative levels are plentiful and the difference in their effect is shaped by the teller but also by the reader:

Scenes of crime can scarce be represented in such a manner but some may make a criminal use of them. But when vice is painted in its low-prized colours, 'tis not to make people in love with it, but to expose it; and if the reader makes a wrong use of the figures, the wickedness is his own. (vi)

The relator refers to the "vicious mind" and the "virtuous reader" in these final passages, placing responsibility clearly on the reader while acknowledging the power of both Roxana's tale and his own adaptations.

In each preface, therefore, Defoe introduces elements that prepare the reader for the many narrative structures utilized throughout the novel. He also reveals the significance of each tale's narrativity, the power Moll and Roxana have to choose the way they will structure their lives and present themselves to their audience, the feature characteristic of the fallen woman's narrative that opens each novel. Each editor indicates the importance of the multiple narrative layers in the overall narrative technique. At the same time, readers of both novels soon realize that the distinction between events, assessment, and application is not as simple as either editor promises. In this sense, the prefaces are essential in establishing the complexity of Defoe's novelistic technique.

The Fallen Woman's Narrative as Characterization

Once Defoe uses each preface to establish his use of narrative episodes, Defoe begins each novel with the standard fallen woman's story related by the fallen woman herself. In doing so, Defoe utilizes the basic elements of the fallen woman's characterization of herself to elicit sympathy from her audience and to reinforce her inferior position in the social hierarchy. Moll and Roxana are typical of fallen women characters because of the circumstances which leave them vulnerable to seduction. While simply being female in early eighteenth-century society made a woman powerless economically, socially, and physically, Moll and Roxana are shown to have uniquely desperate situations that make them even more vulnerable to seduction.

Moll's vulnerability begins at her birth in Newgate prison, the illegitimate child of a mother imprisoned and transported to America for theft. Moll is left an orphan, "exposed to very great distresses even before I was capable either of understanding my case or how to amend it" (12). Although she is given shelter, Moll never has the financial or social protection needed to survive in a society that sees all lower class women as fair game for men. Following the death of her parish Nurse, Moll finds that her only alternative to homelessness is as a servant to a wealthy family, where the classic structure of dependent female and powerful, upper-class male leaves her susceptible to seduction.⁹

Moll's poverty and isolation are only two aspects of the circumstances that leave her vulnerable to seduction. Another characteristic common to fallen women is a unique beauty that makes her more appealing than most women and also leaves her discontent with the limitations of her position. In Moll's case, her initial unwillingness to accept the position of a servant and her desire to be a "gentlewoman" draw attention to her

⁹ Vaid offers an interesting description of the conditions facing servant women in the early eighteenth century.

uniqueness.¹⁰ While everyone finds Moll's goal humorous, they give her special attention that contributes to her vanity, a common downfall for a fallen woman. Moll assesses her young self:

I was now about ten Years old, and began to look a little Womanish, for I was mighty Grave and Humble; very Mannerly, and as I had often heard the Ladies say I was Pretty, and would be a very handsome Woman, so you may be sure, that hearing them say so, made me not a little Proud. (51)

These same ladies, during their charitable visits to the school, give Moll money and clothes, as well as odd jobs, that enable her to avoid going to service. They even invite her to stay at their homes as a guest, not a servant.

When Moll does accept the role of servant after the parish Nurse, her guardian, dies, she is also characterized as exceptional in her new role. As a constant companion of the daughters of the family, Moll is educated along with them, learning to dance, speak French, write, and sing. According to Moll, her uniqueness lies not just in this unusual opportunity but in her natural facility for these skills:

[I] had the Advantage of my Ladies, tho' they were my Superiors; but they were all the Gifts of Nature, and which all their Fortunes could not furnish. First, I was apparently Handsomer than any of them. Secondly, I was better shap'd, and Thirdly, I Sung better, . . . in all which you will I hope allow me to say, I do not speak my own Conceit of myself, but the Opinion of all that knew the Family. (56)

As is common in the fallen woman's narrative, Moll's self-characterization emphasizes features which make her particularly susceptible to seduction. In the subsequent

¹⁰ Moll's aspiration to be a gentlewoman entertains the mayor's wife and daughters who come to visit her. Moll soon realizes that her understanding is different from theirs: "all I understood by being a Gentlewoman, was to be able to Work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear *going to service*, whereas they meant to live Great, Rich, and High, and I know not what" (50). Ironically, Moll bases her definition of a gentlewoman on her observations of a local lace maker, who is described by Moll's Nurse as a "Person of ill Fame" with "two or three bastards" (51).

paragraphs, she also notes that her admirable strengths became a weakness: “But that which I was too vain of, was my Ruin, or rather my vanity was the Cause of it. The lady in the House where I was had two Sons,...” (57). And thus begins the fallen woman’s narrative.

Although the circumstances that lead to Roxana’s fall differ from Moll’s, they still result in a financial and emotional vulnerability that leave her susceptible to seduction. Unlike Moll, whose childhood establishes her financial vulnerability, Roxana’s early years are financially secure. Like Moll, she characterizes herself as appealing to men, with superior dancing and singing skills, as well as exceptional intelligence, beauty, and wealth: “In this manner I set out into the world, having all the advantages that any young woman could desire to recommend me to others and form a prospect of happy living to myself” (2). Unfortunately for Roxana, any young woman of that period did not live “to herself” but was married as well as possible. When married, Roxana faces her financial limits as a woman when both her brother and husband lose all of her money in addition to their own. When her husband leaves her with five children under the age of ten and no means of supporting herself or them, Roxana discovers that her beauty and intelligence ill equip her to care for herself.¹¹

Lacking any support from the males on whom she has been forced to depend and lacking any means of providing for herself, Roxana faces desperate conditions, not as a social outcast like Moll, but within the supposed security of a middle-class family and community. When Roxana appeals to the reader to consider her circumstances, she addresses those within the middle class: “I saw nothing but misery and the utmost

¹¹ Roxana’s early critique of the limitations of marriage is offered when she describes her foolish husband and how he contributed to her ruin, warning other women: “If you have any regard to your future happiness, any view of living comfortably with a husband, any hope of preserving your fortunes, or restoring them after any disaster, never, ladies, marry a fool; any husband rather than a fool” (3).

distress before me, even to have my children starve before my face. I leave any one that is a mother of children, and has lived in plenty and good fashion, to consider and reflect what must be my condition" (9). Perhaps even more than Moll does, Roxana aligns her circumstances with those of her readers ("any one that is a mother") and shows that the vulnerability she faces exists in spite of her supposed financial security, her stable upbringing, her excellent behavior and opportunities, her circle of friends, and her efforts to influence her husband's behavior. Any woman could find herself in similar circumstances.

Like many fallen women, Roxana does what she can to explain the desperation she feels, but she does so with more detail and sophistication than Moll does. Roxana eloquently sets a scene of distress, describing with pictorial detail her destitution in which several visiting women find her. Roxana suggests to her readers, "You shall judge a little of my present distress by the posture she found me in" (11) and describes the scene they discovered and the effect it had on them:

But when they saw me, how I looked, for my eyes were swelled with crying, and what a condition I was in as to the house, and the heaps of things that were about me, and especially when I told them what I was doing, and on what occasion, they sat down, like Job's three comforters, and said not one word to me for a great while, but both of them cried as fast and as heartily as I did. (12)

As in many fallen women's narratives, the effect of the story on the readers is important, and one tactic frequently used is to show the effect of the woman's circumstances on those around her. Roxana uses this opportunity to emphasize her distressing circumstances and to model a sympathetic response for her readers. She very dramatically details how this scene of distress contrasts with what she had formerly known:

The truth was, there was no need of much discourse in the case, the thing spoke itself; they saw me in rags and dirt, who was but a little before riding in my coach; thin, and looking almost like one starved, who was before fat and beautiful.

The house, that was before handsomely furnished with pictures and ornaments, cabinets, pier-glasses, and everything suitable, was now stripped and naked, most of the goods having been seized by the landlord for rent, or sold to buy necessities. In a word, all was misery and distress, the face of ruin was everywhere to be seen; we had eaten up almost everything, and little remained, unless, like one of the pitiful women of Jerusalem, I should eat up my very children themselves. (12)

In a dramatic conclusion to these visual contrasts, Roxana sets the stage for the first problem she must overcome, caring for her five children. When asserting that the “thing spoke itself,” Roxana confirms the role of an accepted visual or narrative construct in conveying an author’s ideas. The emblem, with its biblical allusions, prompts sympathetic reactions to distress that are characteristic of the fallen woman’s narrative.

Once Roxana’s vulnerability is established, the stage is set for her seduction. After leaving her children with relatives, Roxana continues living in her home without paying rent, establishing an obligation to her landlord. When the landlord makes his first proposals to support her financially, Roxana’s maid Amy explains the implications of his advances:

“he is not so unacquainted with things as not to know that poverty is the strongest incentive--a temptation against which no virtue is powerful enough to stand out.... he knows too that you are young and handsome, and he has the *surest bait* in the world to take you with.” (21) [emphasis mine]

Amy identifies the fallen woman’s key traits: poverty and vulnerability. Although Roxana says she would rather die than rely on sex to survive, she establishes the vulnerability that makes her a prime candidate for seduction.

In this initial characterization, each character’s fallenness is linked with circumstance not immorality. Much critical debate has centered on each woman’s reliability as the interpreter and narrator of her own experience, and her ability to manipulate the narrative to her own advantage. This problem is not limited to Moll’s and Roxana’s histories but is inherent in any first-person narrative, which presents the possibility of intentionally or unintentionally adjusting the account for a more favorable

presentation of the narrator. Defoe's prefaces indicate his awareness that any narrative involves a degree of selection and revision, or "dressing up." But Moll's and Roxana's sincerity is not as important as their use of the fallen woman's narrative to characterize themselves. In a fallen woman's narrative, emphasis on standard characteristics such as exceptional beauty, severe financial limitations, and social and physical powerlessness elicit sympathy. Accusing the licentious seducer, condemning herself, and warning other women are all conventional strategies of the fallen woman narrator. My concern, therefore, is not whether or not Moll and Roxana actually dance and sing better than their superiors and peers respectively, but that these narrative conventions are used by a fallen woman narrator to support her natural superiority and justify her fall. By drawing on the fallen woman's narrative in the opening episode of his novels, Defoe not only employs these features for the sympathetic responses they might elicit but also to establish a character type that he later complicates in his overall portrayal of each woman throughout the entire narrative.

Agency and Moral Responsibility in *Moll Flanders*

Each woman's victim status is further supported by the narrative episode that follows. Their characterization as fallen women, vulnerable because of circumstances and society's limitations on women, is supported by their role as objects rather than agents in the plot. In considering Moll and Roxana as objects or agents in the initial seduction, one must look at their role in the trajectory of the fallen woman's plot as defined above. First of all, how does Defoe construct each woman's role in the initiation of seduction? Once fallen, what power does a woman have to respond to her fallenness? Finally, how does a fallen woman choose to live in the very society that labels her fallen? In each fallen woman's narrative, Moll and Roxana present themselves as an object of

male aggression.¹² At the same time, each woman takes some responsibility for the ignorance or individual weakness that made her susceptible to her initial fall. At the end of the fallen woman's narrative, each woman's control and responsibility for facing her role in society becomes the most important issue.

In a classic example of the conditions that leave a young woman vulnerable, Moll is first seduced by the oldest son of the family where she is a servant. Without her virginity, or virtue, Moll's opportunities for financial security, already limited as a woman and an orphan, are further restricted. This initial scene establishes the pattern of Moll's entire life: faced with limited alternatives, Moll is forced to make choices which eventually turn against her, leaving her more destitute than before. In this initial narrative episode of the fallen woman, Defoe presents the forces which work against Moll's ability to act and choose freely. As in many fallen woman's narratives, Moll is the object of other people's desires, a position that leaves her vulnerable to seduction.

In the case of Moll's narrative, Defoe depicts Moll as clearly outside social power, and the elder brother's advances as the typical upper-class abuse of power. The two sons are initially presented as both appealing and threatening: "The lady in the House where I was had two Sons, young Gentlemen of very promising Parts, and of extraordinary Behaviour; and it was my Misfortune to be very well with them both, but

¹² Nancy K. Miller, in *The Heroine's Text*, argues that Moll "functions as an *object* of desire. She is acted upon in an economy over which she has no control" (20). Rather than acknowledge each woman's powerlessness, many critics have focused primarily on their strengths. Ian Watt says that Moll was not "inhibited by the disabilities of her sex." He also speculates that someone like Virginia Woolf admired Moll because she represents a "feminist ideal": "freedom from any involuntary involvement in the feminine role" (113). Yet Watt does not detail the disabilities of Moll's and Roxana's sex, the social limitations that dictate their choices from the start and determine the type of judgments they face in the end. Rather than questioning Moll's and Roxana's options and choices, the link between their sexuality and success is assumed. It is not recognized that their sexuality is the tool by which society exploits them.

they manag'd themselves with me in a quite different Manner" (57). The passive versus active role is immediately evident. Because of her position in the family as an entertaining favorite rather than merely a servant, she is on good footing with all the members of the house. When Moll uses the phrase "to be very well with them both," she uses a verb that connotes a state of being not acting, meaning that she was perceived kindly and treated well by them but did little other than be herself. The sons, on the other hand, had the opportunity and responsibility to "manage themselves," to take an active role in their relationship with her.

Lacking the power available to an upper-class male, Moll also lacks the knowledge of the elder brother's true intention. One of the effects achieved through the first-person narration of a fallen woman's narrative is the woman's ability to assess her own naiveté and her seducer's motives. In offering an account of the elder brother's initial advances, Moll notes his behavior as skillful manipulation:

The eldest, a gay Gentleman that knew the Town as well as the Country, and tho' he had Levity enough to do an ill natur'd thing, yet had too much Judgment of things to pay too dear for his Pleasures, he began with that unhappy Snare to all Women, (*viz*) taking Notice upon all Occasions how pretty I was, as he call'd it: how agreeable, how well Carriaged, and the like; and this he contriv'd so subtilly, as if he had known as well, how to catch a Woman in his Net as a Partridge when he went a Setting; (57)

In retrospect, Moll assesses her seducer's actions in light of an intentional scheme.

Whether Moll's account is sincere or exaggerated is not as important as her choice to place herself in a passive role in her seduction. As the agent in the seduction, the elder brother has the temperament, the skills, and the opportunity to seduce her. Moll understands that the conditions that led to her fall were not only ones of her poverty and exceptional attractiveness but also her powerlessness in the seduction scheme of an upper-class man. In describing how the seduction escalates from flattery to kisses and

declarations of love to ploys to get Moll alone, she refers to the various steps in the seduction as a game for him. The initial flattery she refers to as having “baited his Hook” (58); the first kiss and declaration of love as his playing an “opener Game” (58) and an “Attack” (61). She draws on familiar metaphors and situations when describing the circumstances leading to her fall.¹³

In further detailing the conflict, Moll distinguishes between their levels of experience as one factor in the discrepancy of power between them. In contrast to the elder brother’s knowing advances, Moll is naive and susceptible to his flattery: “It is true, I had my Head full of Pride, but knowing nothing of the Wickedness of the times, I had not one Thought of my own Safety or of my Virtue about me” (61). Moll’s innocence and the elder brother’s intentions are made more evident to the reader when he gives Moll money during his second visit. Moll states: “I was more confounded with the Money than I was before with the Love, and began to be so elevated, that I scarce knew the Ground I stood on” (62). When he begins talking to her of promises “to make me happy,” she assumes he means marriage: “I poor Fool did not understand . . ., but acted as if there was no such thing as any kind of Love but that which tended to Matrimony; and if he had spoke of that, I had no Room, as well as no Power to have said No” (63). Her powerlessness here is not just innocence or love for him but also awareness of an opportunity that she could not refuse. As a servant, she has little “room” (the freedom or alternatives) to deny a gentleman’s offer of marriage much less the power to actually declare her rejection of him. Moll’s naiveté and the elder brother’s scheming provide clear evidence of their roles in the plot: male as active agent and female as passive

¹³ In her essay, “Defoe’s Women: Snares and Prey,” Backscheider notes the recurring snare imagery used in both novels. She argues that Defoe uses these images to reinforce each woman’s initial passivity: “Both are trapped by their poverty and the nature of the society which made it nearly impossible for a woman to function independently” (106-7). These images are common to seduction stories.

object. Even though her curiosity and vanity are apparent, they are responses which the elder brother anticipates and manipulates. In the scene where Moll loses her virginity, she characterizes her behavior as a choice to alter her reaction rather than as a choice to knowingly act: “I made no more Resistance to him, but let him do just what he pleas’d; and as often as he pleas’d” (68). While Moll again admits to her weaknesses in this scene, she offers details of his advances to support the elder brother’s role as the aggressor. In Moll’s retrospective assessment of events, the elder brother is clearly an agent able to choose an objective (Moll) and the means to attain it. Moll, on the other hand, has limited experience and options.

Moll’s innocence and passivity in this seduction are clear, yet she also accepts some blame by reviewing the vanity that makes her more susceptible to seduction, a characteristic typically found in fallen woman’s narratives:

I had a most unbounded Stock of Vanity and Pride, and but a very little Stock of Virtue; I did indeed cast sometimes with myself what my young Master aim’d at, but thought of nothing but the fine Words, and the Gold; whether he intended to Marry me, or not to Marry me, seem’d a Matter of no great Consequence to me; nor did my Thoughts as much as suggest to me the Necessity of making any Capitulation for myself, Thus I gave up myself to a readiness of being ruined . . . (63-4)

While admitting to her readiness (one of Moll’s own words frequently used to support arguments of her guilt) and ignorance, she recognizes in retrospect that this encounter could have been avoided had she “acted as became me, and resisted as Virtue and Honour requir’d” or if he had “Desisted his Attacks” or “made fair, and honourable Proposals of Marriage” (64). Although Defoe relies on familiar roles for men and women in the seduction plot, he always reiterates the moral response they could have had. With the perspective provided by experience, Moll admits that she succumbs to an apparent seduction:

I . . . was taken up Only with the Pride of my Beauty, and of being belov'd by such a Gentleman; as for the Gold, I spent whole Hours in looking upon it; . . . Never poor vain Creature was so wrapt up with every part of the Story, as I was, not Considering what was before me, and how near my Ruin was at the Door, indeed I think, I rather wish'd for that Ruin, than studyed to avoid it. (64-5)

Although Moll can admit to her susceptibility to seduction, the cause of her gullibility is emphasized.

Much criticism has focused on whether Moll's motives in this first episode are based on love or money. Moll's references to money in this section have led some critics to interpret all of her actions in this episode as economically based. In "Moll Flanders' First Love," Maximillian Novak suggests that, when Moll becomes ill, it is "not so much from a broken heart as from the loss of all her 'Expectations' of having the heir for her husband" (641). While marrying a second son would not have been as appealing as marrying a first son, Moll states her preference for the elder brother in emotional not economic terms. The oldest son makes advances toward her first, and she is flattered by and attracted to him, not his brother. Her financial concerns are discussed after the elder brother threatens to withdraw his support if she refuses to marry his brother. Novak himself notes that Moll is forced to accept the elder brother's terms because "she cannot resist the economic realities of her situation" (641), but he does not develop what those economic realities are.

Another interpretation of this initial episode is that Moll's economic concerns follow from rather than precede her seduction. In *Daniel Defoe: Ambition and Innovation*, Paula R. Backscheider points out that Moll's opportunist behavior did not begin until after this first episode:

It is only after the older brother's callous behavior that Moll becomes cynical and self-seeking in her liaisons. She has learned well that money is all and that no one is disinterested in love. Her subsequent experiences reinforce this lesson and extend the list of pitfalls. (107)

Moll's comments come from the perspective of time and experience. Unlike Novak, who assumes that Moll acts out of self-preservation, Backscheider suggests that she naively responds to affection because of the absence of "training to warn her against seduction" (107). Backscheider points out that

[a]lmost any young girl would believe love prompted the man to come to her and to give her presents (money in this case is not illogical--the family would have noticed jewelry or other objects), and to believe the situation rather than inclination prompted his desire for secrecy. (107)

Defending Moll's characterization as a naive young woman, Backscheider sees Moll's behavior fitting her actual circumstances. While love or money can be seen as the cause of Moll's choices, both are common features of the fallen woman's narrative. The conflation of economic and emotional issues is part of this particular narrative structure and its place within broader historical context, as described in chapter two. The fallen woman's narrative accentuates need and naiveté. The motive for such self-characterization is only evident when the results of and reactions to the telling of a fallen woman's narrative are presented.¹⁴

Critics further argue whether Defoe is sympathetic toward or suspicious of each woman's motives. The debate centers on issues of agency and passivity, with different interpretations of Moll's power to choose. In "Defoe's Women: Snares and Prey," Backscheider details evidence of Defoe's clear emphasis on the social forces that limit Moll's and Roxana's options. She suggests that Defoe is sympathetic to Moll and Roxana being caught in the financial problems related to marriage. Both women face the same problem, having to "cope with the life of a lone woman unaided" (105). In considering the situation of eighteenth-century women, their vulnerability and their options, Backscheider summarizes many of the main elements of what I find in the fallen

¹⁴ Consider the differences between Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's uses of these conventions in Fielding's *Amelia*.

woman's narrative: vulnerability, desperate reactions, and limited options that lead to further desperate action.

Many heroines of popular novels were cursed by naiveté and withdrawal of male protection as Clarissa, Moll, and Roxana were. Women were well aware that they were fair game for "men [who] make no scruple to set themselves out as persons meriting a woman of fortune when they had really no fortune of their own." Once the trap is sprung, the women react with despair or grief. There is little surprise, anger, indignation, or complaint. Their society has demanded a passive part from them--things happen to them, not because of them. Roxana's passivity has been criticized, but Moll, too, is passive until she learns her lesson. (106)

According to Backscheider, Defoe actually emphasizes that these women had "been taken advantage of by society" (106).

Richetti sees this initial episode conveying both Moll's passivity and her independence, saying that "the incidents from her childhood that she places before us are as much illustrations of her independence and somehow instinctive sense of strong isolation as they are examples of social determinism" (98). While Moll strives to find a place in middle-class society, she does not succeed because of her position outside that society. Richetti considers the seduction episode as an example of Moll's role as victim.

[C]ircumstances (the seduction by the elder brother) intervene to divert Moll from actually trying to rise by sheer natural abilities into the middle-class world of her employers. . . . Moll does invoke socio-historical conditions and her own ignorance as the specific causes of her seduction: Her seducer, in the same vein, . . . engineers the seduction by a number of carefully executed stratagems. (100-101)

Even when Richetti observes Moll's independence and ability to survive, he still establishes her initial passivity: "The episode illustrates the characteristic double view of the book towards its incidents. Moll is essentially an active intelligence which transforms itself to meet the needs of experience, but she is also necessarily first a passive entity to whom things happen" (101). Moll's passivity as a victim of circumstances is reinforced by the themes and plot of the fallen woman's narrative.

In an early critical consideration of the seduction scene, Novak presents Moll as a character whom Defoe asks the reader to question and not blindly accept at face value. Questioning Moll's motives, Novak points to her vanity and presumptions of superiority to her employers as insubordination that Defoe would have abhorred. Novak states that Moll's inability to see herself as a servant is part of her problem: "Although Defoe was clearly attempting to portray the character of a young servant girl who was destined to fall into sin, Moll seldom speaks of herself as a servant" (638). He reads her behavior throughout as self-seeking pursuit of the elder brother because of the financial opportunities he provides. He also concludes that Moll is a trap for the elder son, an interpretation which does not take into consideration Moll's total lack of control over the situation and the son's complete control over his options. Novak offers an interesting conclusion about what this initial episode is really about:

My main purpose in this brief discussion was to suggest that the first episode of *Moll Flanders* involves a struggle between two self-interested characters--the rake and the clever maid. This conflict is obscured by Moll's narration which transforms what Defoe would have called "Inclination" into love and greed into affection. . . . Moll's "first love" is really herself. (642)

Although Novak sees the conflict as a battle of equals, I see a conflict between the active rake and the passive maid. Even if Moll uses some of the circumstances to her advantage, she has little opportunity to make active choices. Novak's analysis of the plot is most clearly undercut by the narrative elements of the fallen woman's narrative, which elicit sympathy even as they raise questions about her morality.

Interpreting Moll's passivity as a role she plays to gain power over her circumstances does not adequately consider the social conditions that limit her options and agency in any situation. Moll's resilience in circumstances that restrict her as a woman and as a social outsider are a circumscribed form of agency. Langford sees Moll's encounter with the elder brother as an "initiation into the realities of sexual

politics” but argues that any sentimental interpretations which underscore Moll’s victimization do not fit Defoe’s characterization of the pragmatic Moll (173). Langford does note that Moll’s choices when faced with the elder brother’s proposition are not appealing: to accept him means losing her virginity but securing some potential position as a mistress; to reject him could mean losing her position and becoming homeless with no other alternatives than prostitution anyway (173). While acknowledging these potential circumstances Moll could have faced in her society, Langford still does not recognize that Moll’s passivity is enforced by social limits.

Just as Moll is clearly the object of the elder brother’s pursuit and seduction, she also remains an object as she attempts to deal with her fallenness and the powerlessness that ensues. Her limited options become clear in the sentence immediately following her loss of virginity: “and thus I finish’d my own Destruction at once, for from this Day, being forsaken of my virtue, and my Modesty, I had nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God’s Blessing, or Man’s Assistance” (68). While this could be read as an exaggerated plea for pity, Moll’s loss of virginity outside marriage permanently alters her position in society, both morally and socially. She herself holds very little “Value,” and “Man’s Assistance” depends on the assessment of her as a virtuous woman, a sexually pure commodity for exchange of property and procreation of an uncontaminated blood line. Although she marries the younger brother, Robin, she is only able to move outside the designation of a fallen woman through deception and is faced with no other viable option.

Although Moll the narrator recognizes the moment of lost virginity as her fall, young Moll is not aware of the full implications of her condition until Robin proposes and the elder brother retracts his protection. Moll is then forced into a deeper dilemma than her initial affair posed, for Robin’s interest immediately affects her circumstances: the family becomes hostile toward her, which could result in losing her only means of

supporting herself; and the elder brother admits he never intended to marry her and refuses to keep her as a mistress since his brother is in love with her. Publicly accusing the elder brother is not an option.¹⁵ Once fallen, Moll's sexuality labels her in a way that men never experience. As Moll herself describes, "he must needs know that if there was any Discovery, I was Undone for ever? and that even it would hurt him, tho' not Ruin him, as it would me" (73). Moll refers to a double standard commonly represented in the literature of the time.¹⁶ The elder brother's final argument, which convinces Moll to marry Robin, stresses the limited options Moll faces: marry his brother and be happy and respectable or turn him down and be miserable and shamed, "sunk into the dark Circumstances of a Woman that has lost her Reputation" (98). Moll's alternatives for survival and her potential power are dictated by her reputation. Moll summarizes the situation in which she finds herself, the circumstances which are now even more limited than before her fall:

having the Dangers on one Side represented in lively Figures, and indeed heightn'd by my Imagination of being turn'd out to the wide World, a meer cast off Whore, *for it was not less*, and perhaps expos'd as such; with little to provide for myself; with no Friend, no Acquaintance in the whole World, *out of that Town*, and there I could not pretend to Stay; . . . I began to see a Danger that I was in, which I had not consider'd of before, and that was of being drop'd by both of them, and left alone in the World to shift for myself. (100)

With these limited options before her, Moll again is aware of her powerlessness, and she describes her relationship with Robin as being "like a Bear to the Stake" (100). Moll concludes, "So certainly does Interest banish all manner of Affection, and so naturally do Men give up Honour and Justice, Humanity, and even Christianity, to secure themselves"

¹⁵ McLynn describes how seduction or even rape of servant maids by masters was viewed casually in the eighteenth century. If a woman pressed charges, her word was not believed, and she would never be able to work in the same area again (108).

¹⁶ See Bell and Flanders on fallen women in broader discourse of the early eighteenth century.

(101). In spite of her own acknowledgment of her vanity and weakness in the affair, Moll is shown to be a pawn in the hands of the older and younger brother. By limiting Moll's options, Defoe structures into the narrative her lack of agency and draws attention to her powerlessness in society in general.

Although Defoe's construction of the fallen woman's narrative is conventional up to this point, Moll's marriage to Robin provides her with an alternative few fallen women are given. Unlike many fallen women abandoned by their seducers, Moll has a secure, if perhaps distasteful or deceptive, option in marrying Robin. Although Moll is still an object rather than an agent and once again in circumstances where she is powerless, she is given new options. By marrying Robin, Moll assumes a respectable role in society, one with far greater power than her original position as an orphan and servant provided. She has our sympathy for her powerlessness but the social stigma of being a fallen woman is removed, the secret remains hidden (except to the reader who can gain from the warning), and she is able to move on. Once she marries Robin, she no longer has to come to terms with her status as a fallen woman, even though her subsequent choices are continually focused on the deception required to maintain the appearance of chastity.¹⁷ She struggles throughout her life to escape the consequences of being labeled a fallen woman with varying degrees of success.

Faced with more possibilities for her future and some financial security, Moll begins the transition from object to agent in the narrative.¹⁸ Defoe shows that rather than make Moll more virtuous, her initial seduction by the elder brother has made her more

¹⁷ The distance between Moll and the family after Robin's death indicates her unsuccessful integration into an upper-class family. She remains an outsider, while only her children are accepted.

¹⁸ Miller also notes Moll's shift from a passive to active role in the novels, what she calls a "grammatical transformation from object to subject" (20). Miller points out that "by her third marriage, Moll has become the determining agent of her destiny" (20).

assertive about what she wants. She has more experience and confidence but not necessarily more wisdom. After Robin's death, Moll chooses how to handle her freedom and new respectability within the boundaries of her status as the widow of a second son. Unfortunately, at this point she shows little discretion: "I was now *as above*, left loose to the World, and being still Young and Handsome, as every body said of me, *and I assure you I thought my self so*, and with a tollerable Fortune in my Pocket, I put no small value upon my self" (103). Her vanity asserts itself once more. In light of her earlier seduction, Moll attempts to assess her suitors more effectively:

as for their common Design, that I understood too well to be drawn into any more Snares of that Kind: The Case was alter'd with me, I had Money in my Pocket, and had nothing to say to them: I had been trick'd once by *that Cheat call'd LOVE*, but the Game was over. (103)

Moll does not choose according to moral concerns. She herself says, "Thus my Pride, not my Principle, my Money, not my Virtue, kept me Honest" (104). Unfortunately, she marries a tradesman who was a "Rake, Gentleman, Shop keeper, and Beggar all together" (104). With their extravagant spending, they end up in debt and he runs off to avoid prison.

This bad choice is characteristic of Moll's new fall and her subsequent focus on financial survival. She refers to her new husband's financial problems as "Ruin . . . in the grossest Manner," but she assumes more control of her reaction to such ruin (105). Although Moll still reviews her limited options as a woman, she learns how to work with circumstances she is given. Her husband has left her with what little he could, but she is left as a married woman with no husband. Her options for legal marriage are gone, her friends not trustworthy, and her means of survival on her own nonexistent. But at this point, she reinvents herself as Mrs. Flanders and assumes the status of a widow. This episode reveals that Moll has gained some experience, confidence, and knowledge about

how to handle her future, but she still makes bad choices and frequently reacts to others' actions. As a woman, Moll's options are limited, but, from this point on, Moll makes active choices about how to survive.

Moll's role as agent is a complication of her initial characterization as the object of seduction, the pitiable victim of the fallen woman's narrative. Through this initial narrative episode, Defoe portrays Moll in the sympathetic role of a fallen woman, but this role is only one element of Moll's character and life. Defoe extends consideration of Moll's motives and culpability into a much broader plot that moves far beyond Moll's sexual fall. The initial didactic message about aristocratic licentiousness, female vulnerability and vigilance is subsumed by more complex issues.

Questions posed by Moll's self-characterization in the fallen woman's narrative are similar to those frequently raised about Moll in the broader narrative. Is Moll truly a victim? Is she sincerely penitent? Examining the conventions of the fallen woman's narrative puts these same questions into a new framework. Does her portrayal of herself as a pitiable fallen woman through the opening fallen woman's narrative securely engage the reader's sympathy or make the reader more critical of her subsequent behavior? While the fallen woman's narrative elicits interest in and sympathy for Moll's and all women's powerlessness, the ensuing episodes stress the importance of Moll's individual responsibility for her reaction to her fallen condition.

Agency and Moral Choice in *Roxana*

In *Roxana* Defoe again structures a fallen woman's vulnerability and uniqueness as well as her position as an object in a fallen woman's plot before exploring how she attempts to survive and thrive in a restrictive society. Although Roxana's success as a courtesan ("the Fortunate Mistress") is often interpreted as a positive characterization of a woman's fierce independence, Defoe shows that Roxana's success comes at a high cost.

Offering a slightly different situation than that found in *Moll Flanders*, Defoe utilizes a similar fallen woman's narrative but moves the crisis into the upper middle class, demonstrating that the conditions limiting women's survival and the requirements for moral behavior are the same regardless of class. Although initially vulnerable and powerless to ward off her seduction, Roxana's awareness of the immorality of her choices and her role as an agent in her later pursuit of money and independence provides further insight into a woman's survival in eighteenth-century England. Defoe suggests that knowledge alone may not prevent seduction and may make the consequences even more severe.

As detailed above, Defoe establishes early in his characterization of Roxana that she is a unique fallen woman. Her talent, beauty, and money make her appear less vulnerable; they also make her subsequent financial distress even more shocking. As the victim of her husband's irresponsibility, Roxana relates her increasing destitution as she sells off her goods to survive and her emotional trauma in passing off her children to relatives. Roxana summarizes her limited options:

I was now, however, entering on a new scene of life. I had a great house upon my hands, and some furniture left in it, but I was no more able to maintain myself and my maid Amy in it than I was my five children. Nor had I anything to subsist with but what I might get by working, and that was not a town where much work was to be had. (19)

Roxana is faced with destitution and no options in a society that assumes men will take care of women.

Defoe emphasizes the financial limitations that are at the heart of the fallen woman's moral dilemma. As Roxana's landlord makes advances to her by offering simply to help her financially, Roxana describes the effect of her financial problems:

I confess the terrible pressure of my former misery, the memory of which lay heavy upon my mind, and the surprising kindness with which he had delivered me, and, withal, the expectations of what he might still do for me, were powerful

things, and made me have scarce the power to deny him anything he would ask. (26-7)

he financial insecurity makes her more vulnerable emotionally and physically. After he succumbs to her landlord's advances, Roxana vacillates between condemning and justifying her behavior, but she continues to emphasize her limited financial options:

But poverty was my snare, dreadful poverty! The misery I had been in was great, such as would make the heart tremble at the apprehensions of its return; and I might appeal to any that has had any experience of the world, whether one so entirely destitute as I was of all manner of all helps or friends, either to support me or to assist me to support myself, could withstand the proposal. Not that I plead this as a justification of my conduct, but that it may move the pity even of those that abhor the crime. (31)

This is an important paragraph, containing some of the stock justifications for the fall found in all fallen women's narratives. Even when admitting to her vanity, Roxana appeals to the snare of poverty and her limited options:

Add to this that if I had ventured to disoblige this gentleman, I had no friend in the world to have recourse to; I had no prospect--no, not a bit of bread; I had nothing before me but to fall back into the same misery that I had been in before. (31)

The need for bread, repeated throughout her analysis of her role in the seduction, reveals Roxana's need for the basic tools of survival. Like Moll, poverty and limited options are clear motivation for her choices. Options for respectable female independence outside of marriage rarely existed in her society and Defoe emphasizes that her isolation and lack of support make her willing to accept a proposal which she knows to be immoral.

Roxana's role as victim of her husband's financial mismanagement is paralleled by her role as the object of her landlord's seduction. Although assigned the familiar role of seducer, the landlord employs more sophisticated strategies. Because Roxana is a more mature woman than Moll, the seduction requires more subtlety than the elder brother uses on Moll. As in many other seduction scenes, the landlord begins his advances with an unexpected kiss and expressions of admiration, but he offers Roxana a

proposal that allows for her independence. According to Roxana, the landlord states “that he was resolved for the present to do something to relieve me, and to employ his thoughts in the meantime to see if he could, for the future, put me into a way to support myself” (20). While appealing to Roxana’s vanity as the elder brother had to Moll’s, the landlord recognizes Roxana’s maturity and needs; therefore, he employs tactics that allow her to maintain her self-respect.

Although the landlord has adjusted his tactics to suit Roxana’s class and experience, his intent is obvious. When Roxana’s maid Amy points out the reality of his “charity,” as stated above, Roxana is clearly aware of the direction the plot is headed. Unlike Moll and fallen women who are blindly led into their fall, Roxana proceeds fully aware of the threat. The landlord tells her whatever she needs to hear, and, before too long, Roxana admits to the reader that her sense of obligation turns to love, and she actually wants a relationship with him, although she still prefers a legal rather than illicit one. While Defoe emphasizes Roxana’s full knowledge, he still presents her vulnerability and deception as major factors in her seduction.¹⁹

Roxana’s awareness of the process of seduction even as she acknowledges her vulnerability are a significant adaptation of the fallen woman’s narrative. An early example is the landlord’s argument that, since they were both abandoned by their spouses, they could consider themselves single once more and legally marry, a debate that even Amy enters.²⁰ Roxana recognizes the nature of the relationship in spite of the

¹⁹ While Roxana is very hard on herself and generous to her landlord, the reader realizes in later scenes where he lies with Amy that the landlord was motivated by lust as well as love. As Amy herself explains and his gradual inculcating himself into Roxana’s life shows, his motives were fairly clear from the start.

²⁰ The landlord’s account of his invalid marriage contains here echoes of Moll’s experience with both her Bath lover and banker husband who had wives whom they did not consider wives. The banker husband’s wife provides an interesting foil for Moll’s own experience. Caught in her illegal sexual relationships, she commits suicide after the

rhetoric in support of a legal marriage. She even tells Amy, “if I yield, ‘tis in vain to mince the matter, I am a whore” (32). While she clearly understands society’s classification of her behavior, she qualifies that she is not a whore because of her sexual desire, for she states that she “had nothing of the vice in my constitution; my spirits were far from being high, my blood had no fire in it to kindle the flame of desire” (33). Instead, she says her “inclination” to commit the crime was due to the landlord’s generosity and appeal and fear of poverty. With these justifications clearly laid out, she concludes,

I even resolved, before he asked, to give up my virtue to him whenever he should put it to the question.

In this I was a double offender, whatever he was, for I was resolved to commit the crime, knowing and owning it to be a crime. (33)

Unlike many fallen women who claim complete naiveté, Roxana admits to a full understanding of her crime before committing it. Although vulnerable to seduction and an object of desire, Roxana cannot be exonerated because of her self-awareness.

Although Roxana’s logic is more sophisticated than that of most fallen women, she does not initiate the seduction. To begin with, the scene is described with a male aggressor and a female object of desire. In spite of her awareness of the landlord’s ulterior motives, Roxana is not the aggressor and has only the power to react to the landlord’s decisions and advances. She points out the inequity of their positions as they debate the legality of their potential liaison:

I interrupted him and told him there was a vast difference between our circumstances, and that in the most essential part, namely, that he was rich, and I was poor; that he was above the world, and I infinitely below it; that his circumstances were very easy, mine miserable, and this was an inequality the most essential that could be imagined. (33)

banker divorces her. Consider also Roxana’s famous defense against marriage later in the novel.

In an argument that is currently used as the basis of sexual harassment cases, Roxana points out that she remains an object of his pursuit, not a co-conspirator, and he holds the power. She also argues that this “inequality” is “the most essential” element of their relationship. Defoe continues to emphasize a woman’s role as object in the plot by stressing society’s judgment of sexual women:

we were to call one another man and wife, who, in the sense of the laws both of God and our country, were no more than two adulterers; in short, a whore and a rogue. Nor, as I have said above, was my conscience silent in it, though it seems his was; for I *sinned with open eyes*, and thereby had a *double guilt* [emphasis mine] upon me. . . . but my circumstances were my temptation; the terrors behind me looked blacker than the terrors before me; and the dreadful argument of wanting bread, and being run into the horrible distresses I was in before, mastered all my resolution, and *I gave myself up* as above. (35) [emphasis mine]

While Roxana makes it clear that she did not initiate the seduction and remains an object in this struggle for survival, she points out the key reaction to her situation of fallenness: guilt.

Defoe constructs Roxana as a fallen woman with a more sophisticated explanation of her vulnerability but also a more scathing self-appraisal. Her knowledge and consent make her a guilty party, and, in many ways, her future choices are based on money and pleasure as well as her sense of guilt. She judges herself very harshly, and at the end of the novel she is apparently driven to the brink of insanity.

Having established Roxana’s unique “double guilt” in spite of her “circumstances,” Defoe continues to emphasize the role of Roxana’s self-awareness in the second stage of the fallen woman’s narrative, her reaction to her fallenness. Even before Roxana is sexually involved with the landlord, she perceives herself as fallen. After Roxana’s affair with the landlord begins, she continues to blame herself not others. Unlike Moll, who argues vehemently to the elder brother and to the reader for her innocence, Roxana argues for her advance knowledge of her sins. The resulting sense of

guilt, Roxana says, sets her up for more corruption rather than penitence. Knowing that she has sinned, she assesses her options: "When this had thus made a hole in my heart, and I was come to such a height as to transgress against the light of my own conscience, I was then fit for any wickedness, and conscience left off speaking where it found it could not be heard" (36). When assessing her guilt, she embraces the definition of "whore" and pursues it fully. From the simplistic portrait of a victimized fallen woman, Defoe complicates Roxana's character with her repeated and painful self-critique. Roxana's "hole in her heart" contrasts vividly with Moll's "readiness for being ruined."

The effect of Roxana's conviction of her own wickedness is also evident in the scene where she forces Amy into bed with the landlord. The undercurrent through this entire scene is Roxana's self-loathing, for she repeatedly says that she knew she was not a wife, and a wife would not force her maid to sleep with her husband. So the affair between Amy and the landlord proves that she, as she says herself, is really a whore rather than a wife. Even Amy, who had argued vehemently for Roxana's relationship with the landlord, sees her own position as a fallen one, for the morning after they first lie together, she cries to Roxana that "she was ruined and undone, . . . she was a whore, a slut, and she was undone! undone!" (38). The landlord, too, who had been so eager to justify his relationship with Roxana sees the distinction in this affair:

he was quite altered, for he hated her heartily, and could, I believe, have killed her after it, and he told me so, for he thought this a vile action; whereas what he and I had done he was perfectly easy in, thought it just, and esteemed me as much his wife as if we had been married from our youth, and had neither of us known any other; nay, he loved me, I believe, as entirely as if I had been the wife of his youth. Nay, he told me it was true, in one sense, that he had two wives, but that I was the wife of his affection, the other the wife of his aversion. (38-9)

Roxana understands his perspective but it does not change her perception of herself as a fallen woman and a whore, no matter how he justifies his pursuit of her, and it does not prevent him from repeatedly lying with Amy. Roxana continues to use Amy as a means

of confirming all of their corruption until Amy becomes pregnant and she and the landlord refuse to sleep together again.

Because of her self-awareness, Roxana reacts to her fallenness by becoming an agent of evil. Rather than retreat into the security of her role as victim, she assumes the role of “the devil’s agent” and concludes that her wicked behavior would continue as would her guilt:

But as much as I was hardened, and that was as much as I believe ever any wicked creature was, yet I could not help it, there was and would be hours of intervals and of dark reflections which came involuntarily in, and thrust in sighs into the middle of all my songs; and there would sometimes be a heaviness of heart, which intermingled itself with all my joy, and which would often fetch a tear from my eye, And let others pretend what they will, I believe it impossible to be otherwise with anybody. There can be no substantial satisfaction in a life of known wickedness; conscience will, and does often, break in upon them at particular times, let them do what they can to prevent it. (40)

Roxana’s sense of guilt, which is seen here at the conclusion of her initial fall is what pursues her until the end of the novel, in spite of her success as the “fortunate mistress” throughout.

Following her initial fall, Roxana’s role in the plot shifts quickly from object to agent. Although Roxana does not choose to be an abandoned wife, she adeptly uses sex to maintain control over her material life and continues to do so throughout the novel, even when she later marries the Dutch merchant.²¹ For Roxana, sex is the only skill society recognizes in women, and, therefore, leads to the only career in which she can be independent outside marriage. Following a series of extended relationships as mistress, including one with a Prince and later, it is hinted, even the King of England, Roxana is quite wealthy but also much older. When Roxana tires of her lifestyle, she gives up prostitution for practical rather than moral reasons.

²¹ It is important to note that this famous debate reveals Defoe’s ambivalence: he critiques society even as he critiques Roxana herself.

Although successful as a courtesan and mistress, Roxana finds financial security but never emotional or spiritual satisfaction. In spite of her successful career and her later marriage to the Dutch merchant, Roxana is pursued by the guilt that is evident following her initial fall. Throughout her tale, Roxana's self-condemnation reveals her internalization of society's attitudes toward women who have lost their virtue and are forever labeled as whores. Even when making her famous declaration of independence from marriage when the Dutch Merchant first proposes, Roxana's assesses herself as a fallen woman. Roxana's arguments against marriage are commonly viewed as signs of her feminist independence or her business-like greed, but this interpretation places too much emphasis on one aspect of Defoe's complex portrait of Roxana. This scene actually demonstrates how completely Roxana has internalized society's view of her as a whore and has abandoned any hope of a respectable life.

While Roxana's famous indictment of marriage does defend a woman's personal freedom and condemn restrictions placed on wives, it also exposes the high cost Roxana pays for her independence. When Roxana learns that her first husband is dead and she is finally free to marry legally and abandon her life as a mistress, she claims she does not want to be a wife. She describes how a wife exchanges the passion, money, and freedom of a prostitute for indifference, "pin-money," and limitations. At the same time, she admits that too much emphasis should not be placed on these "wicked arguments for whoring." A wife, she points out, has the public recognition of her position, home, and children and is financially provided for as a widow. A prostitute, on the other hand, is left with social condemnation:

The whore skulks about in lodgings, is visited in the dark, disowned upon all occasions before God and man; is maintained, indeed, for a time, but is certainly condemned to be abandoned at last, and left to the miseries of fate and her own just disaster. (113)

Roxana then blames women for choosing to prostitute themselves. In her descriptions of prostitutes—"disowned," "condemned," "abandoned," "the cause of all lies upon her," "hates," "abhors," "aversion," and "curses"—she indicates how she may also view herself (113). Roxana's comparison of a wife and whore undermines her claims to refuse marriage because she desires independence or because her "measure of wickedness was not yet full" (136) and suggests that she is also limited by her self-condemnation.

Roxana masks her guilt with financial arguments and expressions of truly wicked motives. At this point, she chooses to sin of her own accord, a distinction which she emphasizes for the reader when she asks, "And was ever woman so stupid to *choose* to be a whore, where she might have been an honest wife?" [emphasis mine] (135). She asks a similar question after years of living as a courtesan in London: "What was I a whore for now?" (173). She conventionally blames circumstances for her first fall and the devil for her continued behavior, but blames herself in the end. Roxana's decision to continue as a prostitute can be seen as the sin of inclination over necessity, but she is simply living according to society's view of a fallen woman.

In *Roxana*, Defoe demonstrates the power of moral condemnation on an individual's psychological and emotional well-being. Having so completely internalized society's view of her, Roxana sees every aspect of her life in light of being a whore, a label any eighteenth-century woman with lost virtue is unable to escape. She claims to enjoy the wickedness and repeatedly states that her measure of wickedness was not yet full, but the guilt evident during her initial seduction and fall is repeated throughout the novel and haunts her in the same way that her daughter Susan pursues her. Moll's naiveté and rationalizations serve her better psychologically than Roxana's constant knowledge of her guilt and her choices. Defoe demonstrates that, although Roxana suffers because she accepts society's conventional definition of a virtuous woman, she is

responsible for the choices she has made. Unable to relinquish self-condemnation but also unwilling to choose any other alternative than the wicked life she has followed, Roxana drives herself to destruction.

As in *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana* contains the basic elements of the fallen woman's narrative that reveal the limitations a woman faces in eighteenth-century society. As an experienced, although initially victimized, woman, Roxana speaks in an even more sophisticated voice as she structures her life for her audience, a voice concerned with analyzing as well as explaining. Fully aware of the choices she makes, Roxana's role as object in the fallen woman's plot is problematized. Even when reacting to the landlord's advances, Roxana's knowledge of her sins removes the simple dichotomy between her role as object or agent. Defoe suggests that moral agency, the choice of how to live within one's circumstances in society, carries with it responsibility and consequences. No longer dealing with the innocent victim of male seduction, Defoe offers a harsh assessment of Roxana, a portrait that complicates the sympathy elicited by the basic elements of the fallen woman's narrative.

Beyond the Novel: Narrative Constructions of Ambivalence

The tension between pity for Moll's and Roxana's initial seduction and condemnation for their subsequent actions is evidence of Defoe's own ambivalence toward fallen women: he is ultimately unable to offer them any moral strength or power, even when making them both appear to be agents of their life paths after their initial fall.²² Beyond the initial characterization of the victimized fallen woman in each novel, Defoe does not limit himself to the standard "mythic masks" for women and constructs Moll

²² Several critics note Defoe's ambivalence toward his fallen women characters. See Backscheider, Bell's *Defoe's Fiction*, Laurie Ann Chesley, Nelson, Speck, and Vaid.

and Roxana as complex individuals. Even in his relatively sympathetic and complex construction, Defoe does not avoid society's conventional attitude toward fallen women.

Moll's and Roxana's development from powerless objects in the fallen woman's narrative to the complex agents of Defoe's broader narrative represents the power of Defoe's adaptation of "the Amorous Chain of Story," which he promises his readers. Exactly what to make of the effect of this shift causes more debate. Most critics acknowledge the active role both Moll and Roxana eventually assume in the progression of each novel. Even critics attributing each woman's continued victimization to the limitations placed on women in eighteenth-century society suggest that each woman eventually manipulates those circumstances to her advantage.

In *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, Ian Bell sees the shift from passive to active as more clearly related to prescribed narrative positions. Moll starts, Bell suggests, from the "tale of the seduced maiden" but goes on to demonstrate the "possibilities of resilience" (141). Bell looks at the early seduction by the elder brother and notes the distinction between her words and behavior. "Acknowledging the 'fallen maiden' style, she goes on to refute it by rebuilding independent identities for herself time and again throughout her narrative" (141). Bell concludes that, through Moll's many identities, Defoe presents confusing, inconsistent, and complicated images to challenge the assumed categories for women.

However, what the whole narrative cumulatively does is complicate and confuse the sexual economy Moll inhabits. At times, it is seen as fundamentally exploitive of women, who have little legal protection in the face of sustained male aggressiveness and confidence. At others, it is a more complex game in which a few self-confident women may hold secret compensatory powers. (142)

According to Bell, Defoe's portrayal reveals the problems women faced in their confining legal status but also the successes some achieved by surviving under limiting circumstances. At the same time, Defoe's characterization of Roxana indicates that

success must be moral and psychological as well as financial. Roxana's successes are contradicted by a litany of struggles and losses that go deeper than physical survival.

Roxana, Bell notes, begins more as the typical seduced maiden, a condition which is only worsened by the fact that she is an abandoned wife and mother. After attempting to adhere to the legal distinctions between wife or whore, Roxana assumes the role of whore and sees it as a challenge to succeed in that category rather than justify or deny that role. The challenge to her views, though, is in her tragic end.

The whole book then becomes a startlingly sombre account of the legal constraints on women, and the difficulties of living successfully outside them. Roxana's continual quest for an identity is defiant and painful to watch, leaving her caught between the contradictions that Moll Flanders can blithely surmount. Defoe's point seems to be that the legal circumscription of women was impractical and potentially destructive, both in its overt operations and in the way it made women internalise certain very restricted images of themselves. (Bell 144)

Roxana may assume an active role in her future, but she operates within and judges herself based on the limited roles defined by society. Defoe shows the psychological boundaries placed on female agency and the destructive impact of such boundaries on both society and the individual. The fallen woman's narrative offers a useful convention for considering a woman's morality, but Defoe's own narrative offers more complicated issues to consider.

In *Defoe's Narratives*, Richetti notes Moll's change from the naive victim to the self-interested agent after Robin's death. Although she makes an imprudent choice of a husband, "her transition from the naive spontaneity of the seduction is clearly in process, as she describes herself aware of her circumstances, able to maneuver with skill but unsure of her own best interest" (106). She admits that she is not tricked into this second bad relationship but tricks herself. Richetti offers a useful summary of her progress in the novel:

As everyone knows, *Moll Flanders* is about eighteenth-century social and economic realities, but it is also about the superior reality of a self which moves through them, mastering them with a powerful dialectic rhythm and never succumbing to their full implications as cumulatively limiting realities. (108)

Although both Moll and Roxana take active roles after their initial seduction, Richetti observes that they do not become the aggressive female characters found in secret histories or the *chronique scandaleuse* because they retain their feminine traits and do not appropriate “masculine vices such as self-assertion and self-possession” (194). Moll always manipulates traditional roles but never overturns them; Roxana doesn’t become aggressively masculine, although she adds more feminist rhetoric to her actions than Moll does. Roxana

aspires to a new category and actually declares that her ultimate ambition lies in a powerful androgyny. . . . Roxana has a fully articulated ideology of freedom which grasps very clearly the central problem that she solves in her book, the loss of self attendant upon being merely a woman: . . . For Roxana . . . an environment is ultimately a set of external problems to be analysed and solved rather than a set of involving and ineffable determinants. (195)

Unfortunately, Richetti does not acknowledge that the “set of external problems” facing Moll and Roxana have restricted the responses they can make.

In “Defoe’s Women: Snares and Prey,” Backscheider details Defoe’s characterization of women as both victims and victimizers and notes Defoe’s attitude as sympathetic toward their situation but judgmental toward their behavior. After playing the role of victim in the initial seduction scene,

[b]oth are fully aware that sobriety and modesty will get them nowhere, and they put on the armor of deceit. Society rewards deceit. Neither Moll nor Roxana is able to arrange a successful marriage with a man whose parents might be involved. They must settle for the table scraps--the widowers, the divorced, the unfaithful, the opportunists. That they do as well as they do is evidence of their unusual good looks, pleasant personalities, and ingenuity. (105)

Once they find themselves unprotected in their society, their options are limited. In spite of the clear weaknesses and passivity noted in the seduction episodes of each novel,

Backscheider observes each woman's strength in reacting to those circumstances:

"Because they are strong women with a developed sense of self, they fight back against the social evils which victimize them. But in doing this, they become predators and for this Defoe judges them guilty" (103). Even though each woman is clearly trapped in the initial seduction scene, Backscheider does not believe that Defoe intends to exonerate either woman because of the forces that lead to her fall: "That Defoe considers the women predators cannot be overlooked, however. He had no intention for the reader to accept 'necessity' as sufficient excuse for Moll's and Roxana's conduct" (110).

Backscheider sees this shift from the victim to the victimizer in much of Defoe's work: "Whenever Defoe treats women, he scrutinizes the preying-prey facet" (113).

Backscheider notes that, although Defoe is consistently "sensitive to women's predicaments and limitations," he is never fully sympathetic toward his characters (116).

At the heart of Defoe's characterization of Moll and Roxana is the distinction between circumstances and choice. Even though Moll defends her sins by claiming that "vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination" (115), she is responsible for her subsequent choices. The conventions of the fallen woman's narrative in the opening episode of each novel suggest Moll's and Roxana's powerlessness, but Defoe's adaptation of these conventions in the subsequent narrative shifts the emphasis to each woman's power to choose how she deals with her fallenness. While Defoe sympathizes with the social conditions women face and critiques the circumstances that victimize fallen women, he does not accept a narrative construction that suggests an individual is not responsible for her actions. The "amorous Chain of Story" of the fallen woman's narrative provides an excellent structure for seducing his readers' interest in Moll and Roxana, but it is only one facet in his complex portrayal of women's sexuality and morality in eighteenth-century society.

CHAPTER 4
AN UNCOMMON SEDUCTION: RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*
AND THE FALLEN WOMAN'S NARRATIVE

At the conclusion of Samuel Richardson's lengthy epistolary novel *Clarissa*, Clarissa's friend and correspondent Anna Howe looks tenderly on the deceased Clarissa and exclaims: "And is this all!--is it all of my *CLARISSA'S* story!" Anna's reference to story highlights an emphasis on the narrative about Clarissa's experience rather than on Clarissa herself. At a time when the loss of an individual should take precedence, the incompleteness of her life story is noted. Throughout the novel, Clarissa has been considered an emblem of female virtue, an object to be ruled by her family or pursued by Lovelace, the subject of public concern, and an enigma to be interpreted by those around her before, during, and after her fall.¹ As many critics of the last two decades have observed, writing and interpreting, or reading, Clarissa occupy a significant portion of the action and constitute an important metaphor for Richardson's own textual creation.² From William Beatty Warner's (1979) deconstructionist assumption of Clarissa's textual manipulations to Terry Castle's (1982) feminist analysis of Clarissa as cipher for others'

¹John Dussinger sees Anna's declaration as a cry that Anna's faith in a comprehensive narrative has been destroyed (42). Terry Castle emphasizes that as readers our sense of narrative incompleteness parallels Anna's, and we ask "Is it all?" (36). Both critics highlight the significant emphasis on Clarissa's narrative rather than Clarissa herself.

² See also Dussinger, Carol Houlihan Flynn, Christina Marsden Gillis, Nicholas Hudson, Tom Keymer, and Von Sabine Volk-Birke.

interpretations to Terry Eagleton's (1982) famous Marxist analysis of Clarissa as a cultural artifact, critical emphasis lies on the textual constructions that dominate the book.

With narration itself constituting one form of action in an epistolary novel, many critics read *Clarissa* as the battle between Lovelace and Clarissa for the power to narrate and control actual experience. For Clarissa, the struggle to control the account of her experience becomes desperately important because she is powerless socially, economically, and physically against Lovelace in particular but all the men around her in general. In their efforts to restrict her inheritance, force her marriage, and confine her to her room, her father, brother, and uncles attempt to exert their authority over Clarissa just as Lovelace tries to dominate her through his verbal, emotional, and physical control. As a result, language and "Story" are central for Clarissa, whose only power over her circumstances is exerted through her interpretation and description of events. From her early promise to write every detail in her letters to Anna to the final statements found in her will and posthumous letters, Clarissa's use of language becomes her only means, other than her death, of defending her moral integrity against the claims and judgments of Lovelace, her family, and her society.

While Clarissa's letters and final will are physically present in the novel as they are reproduced, read, and responded to, another text is noticeably absent: Clarissa's fallen woman's story. Although a coherent account of events is called for by several characters in the novel, Clarissa never completes this narrative. As Castle and others have noted, this lack of a coherent narrative with a single narrator is not only the result of Richardson's epistolary technique but also of Clarissa's powerlessness to control interpretations of her behavior. What critics have failed to recognize, though, is that the "Story" that is directly requested has the defining features of the paradigm of the fallen woman's narrative. When Anna and her mother repeatedly ask Clarissa to compose a

already written, they desire a “Story” that could serve as a true and complete account of her experience and as a warning to other women. In this request, they indicate the desire for a specific plot as well as the elements of first-person narration, didactic purpose, and a sympathetic audience that are characteristic of the narrativity that distinguishes the fallen woman’s narrative from other seduction plots. Although Clarissa indicates her awareness of the power of the fallen woman’s narrative as a means of sympathetically presenting her case to the world, she is unable to complete this separate narrative and instead arranges to have Belford compile letters (many in Lovelace’s hand) relating her tragic experience. The presence yet significant absence of the fallen woman’s narrative in Richardson’s *Clarissa* becomes an important commentary on the relationship of the fallen woman’s narrative I have identified to Richardson’s new writing style.

While Clarissa’s “Story” receives separate attention, her letters are her most evident access to narrative power before and after her death. Like Lovelace, whose gift for “writing to the moment” is as well known as his seductions, Clarissa admits to (and her family tries to restrict) her knack for “scribbling.” At times, she refers to pouring out her heart through her pen with a passion very clearly linked to her emotional and psychological survival.³ Naively believing she can offer all the “particulars” of her experience, Clarissa’s letters provide the only control she has over her circumstances, particularly as a means of interpreting what has happened.

This link between letter writing and self-understanding and control is a common theme in *Clarissa* criticism. As Castle notes, “Clarissa’s struggle for language marks off at a basic level, however, the nature of her larger struggle: to make meaning itself out of her experience, to articulate a reading of events” (23). Unlike Lovelace who has access to very literal power of what Castle calls the “‘modes of production’ in the epistolary

³ See Castle, Margaret Ann Doody, Eagleton, Flynn, Gillis, and William Beatty Warner among others.

world,” Clarissa must rely on her limited narrative options for her only avenue to power. Castle points out how Lovelace’s physical power parallels his hermeneutic power: “The power to determine the significance of events, to articulate one’s reading of experience and impose it on others, is a function of political advantage alone, and identified finally with physical force” (116). The power over language, then, has a very real parallel to the power over experience.⁴ At the same time, language offers only one avenue to power. Eagleton notes the power of writing for women: “In an oppressive society, writing is the sole free self-disclosure available to women, but it is precisely this which threatens to surrender them into that society’s power” (49). While language provides some access to power for women, that power is limited by the cultural definitions and limitations on language itself.

The relationship between Clarissa’s limited power and her letters is an important one, but the relationship between her potential power and her later construction of a separate narrative is also intriguing. As I will detail in the following pages, Clarissa’s story involves more than the letters she writes. When Clarissa is asked to tell her story, to construct a coherent narrative of her experience for a specific audience, Clarissa is being asked for a fallen woman’s narrative, a story that will appeal to her audience and influence its understanding of her experience. By constructing this final story, Clarissa could exchange the role of a fallen woman sharing her experience with a friend for that of a fallen woman telling her story and justifying her situation to the world. But, as many

⁴ The danger of this analysis of textual power is the reduction of Clarissa’s physical reality to textual circumstances. In what I will call the “Warner controversy,” critics argue against Warner’s irresponsible reduction of Clarissa’s rape to a merely hermeneutic and not a physical act. See Castle, Eagleton, and Keymer among others for very direct responses to Warner’s analysis of Clarissa’s narrative power without any consideration for the cultural realities Richardson presents in *Clarissa*. See Flynn and Eagleton for historical conditions of and ideological assumptions about women in eighteenth-century England.

critics have noted, the “whole story” is never possible and *Clarissa* quite literally abandons her effort to retell her experience, choosing in its place a collection of letters to be edited by Belford, a text similar to the 1500+ page text the reader holds in her hands.⁵ While *Clarissa* is a fallen woman and *Clarissa* contains elements found in fallen woman’s narratives, the epistolary novel itself deviates from the fallen woman’s narrative. In the following chapter, I argue that Richardson’s novel contains elements of and references to important features of the fallen woman’s narrative, even as it offers something dramatically different as a “new Species of Writing.”⁶ In order to emphasize the uniqueness of his epistolary technique, Richardson contains within his overall narrative the desire for and refusal of a fallen woman’s narrative.

A Paragon Among Fallen Women

That *Clarissa* is a novel about a fallen woman is certainly not a new observation. Any student of the eighteenth century quickly identifies *Clarissa* as the most sympathetic and most tragic of the century’s fallen women, or as Carol Houlihan Flynn describes her, a “paragon on earth” (21), who “has more virtue than any virgin” (143).⁷ While Moll

⁵ Flynn frequently refers to the edition before the reader as the same edition as the one Belford edits. Castle, on the other hand, points out that *Clarissa*’s plans for Belford to edit a collection of letters is never clearly linked to the collection of letters we are presented with in *Clarissa*. In the fictional production of these epistolary texts, Castle sees inherent questions about the veracity and reliability of the edition we read, with the possibility of changed names and omitted information. She also notes that the typographic details of the edited text actually emphasize the distinction between the actual letters and the collection we read. Many editions of *Clarissa* typographically reproduce “Paper X” with *Clarissa*’s writing at different angles.

⁶ Several helpful studies treat Richardson’s unique contribution to the development of the novel in his handling of the epistolary form, from Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel* to Gillis’ *The Paradox of Privacy*. It is critical commonplace to note this new technique as the source of the novel’s power.

⁷ Warner interprets *Clarissa*’s status as paragon as another tool to manipulate her audience:

Flanders' sincerity is questioned and Roxana's guilt understandable, Clarissa is perceived as the most undeserving of her fall and the most admirable for her stoic renunciation of Lovelace, even if it does result in her tragic, albeit noble, death. In this lengthy tome, Richardson provides the most in-depth construction of the fallen woman in any century and the most successful eighteenth-century redefinition of female power in will and spirit rather than in body.⁸

Because of Clarissa's prominence among fallen women in eighteenth-century fiction, it would be an egregious error not to include *Clarissa* in an analysis of the fallen woman's narrative, even though the novel as a whole is not and does not contain a fallen woman's narrative where Clarissa constructs a coherent story for a sympathetic audience. Although the actual fallen woman's narrative is missing, it still becomes an important part of Richardson's narrative technique. In creating a new style of writing, Richardson draws heavily on the familiar fallen woman's paradigm for the construction of his

"Queen of the universe" and "presence of millions" are suggestive phrases, for they connote the central position of *passive dominance* [emphasis mine] the paragon wins. Clarissa's apparent passivity helps to protect her dominance, by making her position seem "natural" and inevitable, rather than political (and thus saturated with effort, calculation, and consequence for others). (22)

I would agree with Warner that Clarissa's passive position is constructed in a way that makes it seem natural, but I would argue that society imposes this definition on Clarissa. Clarissa does not assume powerlessness as an avenue to power. She frequently bemoans her lack of power and her limited options.

⁸ Flynn praises Richardson's ability to complicate his portrayal of a fallen woman, even though his own ambivalence, a mixture of pity and disgust, is evident in his other writings:

In Richardson's world, the fallen woman is a wretched creature doomed to a bad end. Yet his own Clarissa transcends the conventions he employs. She avoids the traditional paths awaiting her: she does not take to the streets, does not marry her seducer, and does not become pregnant. (121)

Although these fates are common for fallen women in literature, most fallen women who survive to tell their tales in the fallen woman's narrative do not end up in this position (although Moll does end up in the streets temporarily and Miss Mathews is a mistress for life). Richardson is not unusual in employing the fallen woman's paradigm with a more redeeming conclusion, although it could be argued that death, even when self-willed, is not a desirable end.

narrative, but very consciously develops a narrative form that goes beyond the familiar techniques. Although Richardson's "writing to the moment" is very different from a fallen woman's narrative that is constructed in retrospect with a particular motive, structure, and audience, Richardson obviously employs elements of the fallen woman's narrative in his construction of *Clarissa*, building his plot on the familiar seduction plot and offering characterizations and themes found in the fallen woman's narrative.

Plotting the Fallen Woman's Narrative

Features of the fallen woman's narrative are evident throughout the letters that make up Richardson's novel, even as he complicates both the plot and the characterization in unique ways. The uniquely exceptional woman, her financial constraints, the seducer's guilt, and society's sympathetic reaction are all present. The relationship of these features to popular narrative models is also noted by characters and the editor himself.⁹ When Lovelace's role as the vile seducer and Clarissa's as the

⁹ Beginning with Doody's important description of dramatic and novelistic sources, many critics trace potential sources of Richardson's novels, although no critics identify the particular fallen woman's paradigm I have described. Doody reviews the elements found in Restoration heroic tragedy as well as the seduction/rape tale and the courtship novel by women. In her focus on Richardson's adaptation of the sentimental and fallen woman of earlier literature, Flynn mentions the elevation/degradation formula of sentimental novels by women as well as the more scandalous "apologies" by famous fallen women.

Like other writers such as Ian Bell, Flynn notes the popularity of, and Richardson's disgust with, the apologies of Teresia Constantia Phillips and others as evidence that Richardson was attempting something new with his fiction. She does point out that "[w]e must remember, however, that Clarissa arranges to have the epistolary record of her own outrage published--a memoir that in 'real life' would have created an infamous stir" (114). I would also add that she attempts to construct a coherent fallen woman's story at Mrs. Howe's insistence before she settles on edited letters as her substitute memoir. Noting the same memoir by Phillips, Gillis cites a new probable source for *Clarissa*, *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of Sally Salisbury* (1723) by Charles Walker, an epistolary memoir where each letter is written by a different character telling about a different incident.

Gillis looks to epistolary sources, focusing on genre rather than theme or plot for her analysis of *Clarissa*. Keymer focuses on Lovelace's use of literary sources in drama

powerless victim are presented, they are frequently compared to literary narratives that serve as models for Lovelace's behavior, for Clarissa's understanding of her circumstances, and for society's interpretation of events.

The most frequently explored origins of *Clarissa's* plot and Lovelace's particular plotting are found in libertine literature and Restoration drama referred to by Lovelace himself as a source of his own attitudes and behaviors. In fact, many critics consider Lovelace one of the most sophisticated and complicated portrayals of the rake in eighteenth-century fiction.¹⁰ A reputed and admitted libertine quite proud of his success at the game of seduction, Lovelace repeatedly describes previous seductions and expects Clarissa's behavior to follow the reactions he has previously encountered. After raping Clarissa, Lovelace writes to Belford, "Miss Clarissa Harlowe has but run the fate of a thousand others of her sex--only that they did not set such a romantic value upon what they called their *honour*; that's all" (885). Several times, Lovelace refers to the libertine maxim that guides his objective for Clarissa: "Once subdued, always subdued" (930).

Lovelace also uses popular drama to characterize his behavior and influence Clarissa's interpretation of his actions. By taking Clarissa to the play, *Venice Preserved*, Lovelace hopes she will interpret behavior in the context of such a courtship plot, where two lovers desire marriage against their parents' wishes. In addition to offering a model for defying parental authority, the play will show Clarissa that "there have been, and may

and libertine literature to rewrite Clarissa's tragic story, where "Clarissa's own story of oppression and rape is rewritten as one of erotic quest" (181). In a more recent critical work, Lois Bueler offers a specific paradigm as the mythic origins of Richardson's plot and labels this the Tested Woman Plot.

¹⁰ Critics like Flynn have examined the centrality of the rake figure to Richardson's novels. See Flynn's chapter "A Lovelace in Every Corner: The Rake Figure in Richardson's Novels" in *Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters*. Doody explores the dramatic sources of the Restoration rake, while Keymer goes further to examine how Richardson's adaptation of the libertine in Lovelace becomes a tool to rewrite the standard seduction story as told from the female's point of view.

be, much deeper distresses than she can possibly know” (620). Clarissa’s reaction to the play actually demonstrates Clarissa’s desire for Lovelace’s reform. Clarissa, having already thought it was a “deep and most affecting tragedy in the reading,” is “greatly moved at the representation” and is impressed that Lovelace was evidently “very sensibly touched,” a show of sensitivity that surprises and pleases her at this early stage in her seduction (640). The reader, however, knows Lovelace’s motives and sees the play as a model of tragic love that ends up destroying all those involved, a model that actually is followed in the novel.

Lovelace’s knowledge of literary sources for his behavior is also evident in the different styles he uses to present his story to Belford. In some places, he assumes a dramatic form, complete with scene descriptions and speech tags. When describing his constant arguments with Clarissa, he tells Belford, “I will write a comedy, I think. I have a title ready; and that’s half the work. *The Quarrelsome Lovers*” (571). Following Clarissa’s threat to stab herself, he closes his account to Belford saying, “And here ends The history of the Lady and the Penknife!!!” (952). Lovelace also views himself in literary terms: “But was ever hero in romance (opposing giants and dragons excepted) called upon to harder trials!” (146). Clearly, Richardson offers and Lovelace emphasizes literary models for Lovelace’s own seduction plot, the melodramatic conflicts, and sentimental responses. Castle calls Lovelace’s continual references to literary sources his “obsession with textual mediacy” (85). According to Castle, the textual models provide more than convenient plot paradigms; they provide structures of thought and identity.¹¹

¹¹ Castle describes how Lovelace uses these models from libertine literature and drama not only to shape his own plots against Clarissa but also to construct his notions of Clarissa herself, notions that have very little to do with who Clarissa really is: “What she is, of course, is the ‘Story’ that never gets told--of which the text of *Clarissa* itself, as we will see, is the fractured symbol” (87). Castle sees in Lovelace’s letters a constant attempt to construct Clarissa according to his own desires. As Castle argues, Clarissa is “forced to carry the metaphoric burden of everything that he and his ‘Rakes’

Unfortunately for Lovelace, Clarissa's attitude and behavior contradict the expectations of literary models and make her seduction an unusual one indeed. As Lovelace himself notes after he rapes Clarissa, "I must own that there is something very singular in this lady's case" (885). These elements of libertine literature and drama provide prototypes for Lovelace's behavior but do not determine the outcome of the plot.

The seduction plot, a common element in Lovelace's literary sources, can also be found in the fallen woman's narrative and other popular fiction. This seduction plot, with the rapacious, duplicitous seducer and his vulnerable, naive young victim, also influences Clarissa's perception of her own experience as is evident in her awareness of her powerlessness as well as of other foils for herself as a fallen woman. Indeed, early in the novel, Clarissa and Anna seem very aware of the components of this master narrative of seduction, particularly the role of woman as the object of male pursuit. In relating the circumstances which caused her to run away with Lovelace, Clarissa notes very early that she was in his power in spite of his promises to allow her to be "absolutely [her] own mistress" (393). Fully aware of the "shocking number of indelicate circumstances" in her situation (143), Clarissa recognizes a seduction plot and chastises herself: "Fie upon me! for meeting the seducer!--Let all end as happily as it now may, I have laid up for myself remorse for my whole life" (398). While this statement indicates Clarissa's tendency to judge herself harshly for any slip in her conduct, her reference to Lovelace as the seducer places her within a plot where the seduced maiden is ultimately at the mercy of the seducer. Even without a physical loss of her virtue, Clarissa recognizes her powerlessness to control her fate.

In addition to references to literary sources and the familiar seduction plot, Richardson also suggests Clarissa's potential role as a typical fallen woman by offering

Confraternity' have ever said about mythic 'Woman.' She is weighted with a significance over which she has no control" (88).

foils for Clarissa that have the conventional characteristics of exceptional beauty and/or financial vulnerability that are used in the fallen woman's narrative. Once Clarissa is in Mrs. Sinclair's house in London, Richardson offers an editorial comment that two other women of the house (Mrs. Sinclair's "associates"), Sally Martin and Polly Horton, are "[c]reatures who, brought up too high for their fortunes, and to a taste of pleasure and the public diversions, had fallen an easy prey to his [Lovelace's] seducing arts" (534). Like Moll Flanders, these two women had skills that surpass others in their station and vanity that made them susceptible to seduction. They are also clearly taken in by Lovelace's "arts," another feature found in the fallen woman's narrative.¹²

Another foil serves as a counterpart to Clarissa's relationship with Lovelace. Lovelace's potential seductive power is evident in his treatment of a local innkeeper's daughter as he waits for Clarissa to make up her mind about leaving her family. As Anna gathers and relates information about Lovelace's attention toward an attractive young woman named Betsy (Rosebud), she readily utilizes the rhetoric and patterns of the seduction plot, quickly concluding that "the girl's undone" (285).¹³ When Anna discovers later that Lovelace helped arrange the young woman's marriage to a local boy, she and Clarissa conclude that the seduction did not lead to a fall and that Lovelace might be reformed. By appearing to seduce his "Rosebud" and then sparing her, Lovelace hopes to convince Clarissa of his goodness but also demonstrate his power. Not only is Lovelace capable of seduction, but he is capable of using the patterns of seduction to his own

¹² Lovelace and others refer to another woman Lovelace has seduced, a Miss Betterton that later died in childbirth, although we are not given many details about her "story."

¹³ Richardson utilizes the rhetoric of pursuit and seduction found in many fallen women's narratives with familiar metaphors and images such as the hunt and prey, battle, ship, pit or precipice, test or trial, etc. See Elizabeth Bergen Brophrey, Doody, and Flynn for discussions of Richardson's imagery. Lovelace's famous caged bird metaphor is a revealing instance of this rhetoric. Specifically sexual imagery is also used: garden, key, lock, barbed shaft, etc.

advantage. Although this seduction is aborted, Richardson offers this incident as an interpolated seduction plot that resonates with Lovelace's treatment of Clarissa.

Awareness of the master narrative of the seduction plot shapes not only Lovelace's own plotting and Clarissa's sense of her powerless position, but also other people's reactions to the events that constitute the familiar fallen woman's narrative. Anna compares Clarissa's circumstances with those found in a literary narrative: "A poet, my dear, would not have gone to work for an Angelica, without giving her her Violetta, her Cleanthe, her Clelia, or some such pretty-named confidante—an old nurse at the least" (291). In presenting how others react to Clarissa's situation, Richardson explores some of the common responses to the seduction plot: enjoyment, tolerance, judgment, and sympathy.

Although Richardson would most heartily despise tolerance of seduction in either actual or literary instances, he demonstrates the belief that some men actually enjoy the behavior of the libertine and that some young women are secretly attracted to the rake that seduces them. Lovelace's uncle, Lord M, revels in Lovelace's accounts of his corruption. Lovelace complains to Belford:

he [Lord M.] makes me sit hours together entertaining him with my rogueries (a pretty amusement for a sick man!); and yet, whenever he has the gout, he prays night and morning with his chaplain. But what must *his* notions of religion be, who, after he has nosed and mumbled over his responses, can give a sigh or groan of satisfaction, as if he thought he had made up with Heaven; and return with a new appetite to my stories?--Encouraging them by shaking his sides with laughing at them, and calling me a sad fellow in such an accent as shows he takes no small delight in his kinsman. (1023)

Lord M's appetite for Lovelace's tales goes beyond tolerance to encouragement.

Lovelace notes a similar inconsistency when he flirts with one of his own cousins: "But I observed that though the girls exclaimed against me, they were not so angry at this plain speaking" (1024). Amused tolerance of Lovelace's behavior evidences a broader

tolerance of the titillating accounts of seduction that overlooks and even condones the cruelty that fuels them.

General social tolerance of seduction is most obvious in the reaction of Clarissa's Cousin Col. Morden, who arrives too late to prevent Clarissa's abduction and rape but who is involved with attempts to resolve the crisis. Although upset by some aspects of the situation, he even meets with Lovelace and is initially satisfied that Lovelace's motives and behavior are not out of the ordinary. He declares that if

there were anything *uncommon* [emphasis mine] or barbarous in the seduction, as one of [her] letters had indeed seemed to imply (. . . anything *worse* than perjury, breach of faith, and abuse of a generous confidence!--sorry fellows!) he would avenge his cousin to the utmost. (1314)

Morden later tells Belford that "had his beloved cousin's case been that of a *common seduction* [emphasis mine], and had she been drawn in by . . . the delicacy of intrigue (her own infirmity or credulity contributing to her fall), he could have forgiven [Lovelace]" (1477). When Morden determines that Lovelace's efforts were "uncommon," he challenges him to the duel that results in Lovelace's death. This distinction between common and uncommon seductions suggests accepted and even conventional parameters for sexual conflict and a complicated attitude toward female sexuality and the moral system in which chastity is so valuable under certain circumstances.¹⁴

The conflicting reactions to seduction reveal an age struggling with its perception of fallen women. Richardson presents the dismissive judgmental attitude as presumptuous and erroneous with people more readily assessing reputation and appearance than intention and reality. Even before people discover that Clarissa has been raped, she is classified as fallen because she has acted outside the accepted limits of

¹⁴ See Bueler's discussion of *Clarissa* as an example of the Tested Woman Plot, where the tested woman, whether fallen or virtuous, "becomes emblematic of an entire moral system" (24).

female behavior. Anna tells Clarissa that her family is cruel, because “in spite of all your virtues they conclude you to be *ruined*” (474). As her Aunt Hervey points out, all the circumstances result in her being considered fallen: “I know your purity--but, my dear, are you not out of all protection?--Are you not unmarried?--Have you not (making your daily prayers useless) thrown yourself into temptation? And is not the man the most wicked of plotters?” (505). Arabella, relaying her father’s curse and her entire family’s renunciation of Clarissa, calls her a “base unworthy creature!--the disgrace of a good family and the property of an infamous rake” (510). After Clarissa’s rape, both Arabella and her mother later distance themselves from their fallen relative by referring to her as “the unhappy body” (1156). Richardson contrasts these judgmental attitudes with the more sympathetic responses by those who learn more of the circumstances and truth about Clarissa’s “fall.”

With this sympathetic response as his primary objective, Richardson models such sentimental outpouring of support. Lovelace complains to Belford that Anna had forwarded parts of Clarissa’s letters to his aunts and describes his family’s reaction:

What we have been told of the agitations and workings, and sighings and sobbings of the French prophets among us formerly, were nothing at all to the scene exhibited by these maudlin souls at the reading of these letters; and of some affecting passages extracted from another of my fair implacable’s to Miss Howe--Such lamentations for the loss of so charming a relation! Such applaudings of her virtue, of her exaltedness of soul and sentiment! (1169)

Lovelace is aware here of the French romances that influence not only his own behavior but also the reactions of others to a seduction story, so familiar to his society. Mrs. Harlowe is particularly disturbed by the sympathetic support for Clarissa. She complains that “the general cry against us abroad, wherever we are spoken of; and the *visible* and not seldom *audible* disrespectfulness which high and low treat us with to our faces, as we go to and from church, and even *at* church, . . . as if she were innocent, we all in fault”

(1157). The judgmental are judged. The sentimental effect is also evident in the responses of Dr. H.; Mr. Goddard, the apothecary; Mrs. Smith; and Mrs. Lovick; in addition to many others who hear about Clarissa's experience or view her body and coffin. Belford's reform stands as the ultimate example of the moral consequences of a sympathetic response to a touching story of virtue. References to libertine models, seduction plots, and fallen women suggest a society keenly aware of the patterns and language of seduction.¹⁵ These references parallel Richardson's own conscious use of a master narrative of seduction in constructing the plot of *Clarissa*.

In addition to utilizing the seduction plot, which is at the heart of the fallen woman's narrative, Richardson addresses themes characteristic of the fallen women's narrative, such as financial difficulties, aristocratic abuses, and female vulnerability. Clarissa's initial conflict is explicitly grounded in material issues, particularly with marriage for love versus property at the heart of the conflict. Unlike Moll and Roxana, who find themselves vulnerable to seduction because they lack the financial means to support themselves, Clarissa's financial independence sets the stage for the power struggles that lead to her seduction. Issues of money become intertwined with issues of obedience, as the family acts out a drama of social hierarchy which Clarissa does not intend to challenge. In its concern for money, *Clarissa* is also very clearly a middle-class critique of aristocratic values, with Lovelace providing the classic rake as villain, embodying the licentious, vicious crimes committed by the amoral upper class which is more concerned with form than with substance, with power than with virtue, with the game than with the goals. In addition to critiquing the abuses of the aristocracy through Lovelace's behavior, Richardson provides foils for Lovelace in Belton's death and Belford's reform, both clear condemnation of the libertine and the class that has the

¹⁵ See Flynn on eighteenth-century attitudes toward the threat of seduction.

money to indulge any appetite it has, with concern only for itself. As Belford points out to Mowbray toward the end of the novel, “See the blessed effects of triumphant libertinism! Sooner or later it comes home to us, and all concludes in gall and bitterness” (1358).¹⁶

With the emphasis on rewards and punishments, Richardson illustrates the importance of morality over money. Clarissa, the only one willing to make a decision based on morals rather than on property or status, voices a vital component of a middle-class critique of the aristocracy: that class is not so much at fault as the failure to live up to the duties of that class. As Clarissa points out, “birth, worthily lived up to, was virtue: virtue, birth; the inducements to a decent punctilio the same; the origin of both one” (169). Richardson, like many other eighteenth-century writers, aspired to equal access to power for the middle class without losing the distinctions and privileges that class provided. *Clarissa* clearly becomes a narrative enactment of eighteenth-century England’s tensions between the upper class and middle class.

As many critics have noted, the eighteenth-century novel is not only an embodiment of middle-class ideology but also a critique of the abuses of middle-class

¹⁶ Even though the novel does reveal tolerance of and interest in the libertine as indicated by Lord M’s reaction to his stories, even though we are intrigued by Lovelace as we are party to his reasoning and emotional turmoil (much as Milton makes the character of Satan so appealing--see Keymer), and even though everyone encourages Clarissa to marry Lovelace in spite of what he has done to her, Richardson clearly condemns Lovelace’s values and his behavior, aptly punishing him with his death at Col. Morden’s sword. Richardson condemns society’s fascination with the rake (even Clarissa herself is guilty of being intrigued by Lovelace’s wit and good looks) and its tacit approval of his abuses of power. Clarissa repeatedly points out the great moral inconsistency in criticizing Lovelace’s actions and then encouraging her to marry him. Ultimately, other characters acknowledge that the greatest proof of her virtue is her rejection of his marriage proposal after the rape.

morality.¹⁷ *Clarissa* is no exception. One need only read Richardson's preface to identify the central issues of marriage for love and parental abuse of authority, both issues within the middle class itself. His portrait of the Harlowe family, with its obsession for increased wealth and power and its cruel disregard for Clarissa's dignity as an individual, offers a scathing attack on middle-class values gone awry. Their abuses of power, while not as evil as Lovelace's, contribute to Clarissa's tragic fate. In this critique, Richardson also links the moral with the material. Clarissa's chastity is an important element of her moral virtue but also integral to her material value as a means of expanding the Harlowe family wealth through her marriage to Roger Solmes.

Richardson employs another common feature of the fallen woman's narrative, the vulnerability of the woman herself and her repeated self-condemnation. In spite of Lovelace's obvious scheming to seduce Clarissa, she, like other fallen women, is blamed for her fall, even though the accusations are not always accurate. Young Betsy was too exceptionally pretty, Sally and Polly too vain, Clarissa too witty and headstrong. As Lovelace himself tells Belford: "I believe that nine women in ten who fall, fall either from their own vanity or levity, or for want of circumspection, and proper reserves" (664). Clarissa repeatedly accuses herself of vanity, indiscretion, and pride, even as she justifies every step she has taken. While these conventional self-accusations may seem unfair to the reader aware of Lovelace's machinations, the inclusion of an element of cause for a woman's downfall is typical of the fallen woman's narrative.

Like other fallen women, Clarissa's vulnerability is related to her exceptional beauty.¹⁸ She is truly unique in her role as a paragon of virtue. In many ways, Lovelace is

¹⁷ See Eagleton's study of the novel as "public mythologies, coordinates of a mighty moral debate, symbolic spaces within which dialogues may be conducted, pacts concluded and ideological battle waged" (5).

¹⁸ See this similar element in novels ranging from Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the*

not blamed for being attracted to such a superior female. Throughout the novel, her position as an example of virtue and beauty is attested to by everyone. As Arabella points out scornfully, Clarissa is the “celebrated, the blazing Clarissa” (509). Although Clarissa does not ask for this role as exemplar, she is placed on a pedestal and then accused of abusing her position, as if being made an object imbues her with power over others. Lovelace himself notes Clarissa’s reputation as a “paragon of virtue” and “virtue itself” (427). He is interested in testing whether she is an “angel or woman” (492). Her superiority poses a challenge to his libertine skills.

Even though a woman is expected to have superior moral fortitude, she is still assumed to be subordinate. As is true in many instances, any show of exceptional power is characterized as unnatural and therefore threatening. Clarissa, whose tests require a highly unusual amount of moral strength, is attributed with supernatural power for both good and evil, as is evident by the recurring instances of the word “bewitching.” Lovelace refers to her as “bewitchingly noble” (646), while her sister says that Clarissa “bewitched people, by [her] insinuating address,” used her “bewitching *meek* pride” to gain attention, and actually bewitched her grandfather to gain an inheritance (194). The idea that she gains power through her position as an object of admiration, a model for others, is directly contradicted by her powerlessness to alter her family’s or Lovelace’s treatment of her. Her beauty makes her an object for Lovelace’s seduction and her sister’s jealousy; her inheritance incites her brother’s envy and Solmes’ marriage proposal; her intelligence and wit are suspected as manipulation; her dignity and desire for independence and free choice in marriage are perceived as disobedience. Even though Richardson shows these assumptions to be false, he demonstrates that these attitudes

Streets, and Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground*, among others, where exceptionally beautiful women are glaring targets for seduction.

restrict Clarissa's options and actually influence the way people treat her, resulting in even greater vulnerability and powerlessness.

Like many fallen women, though, Clarissa gains our sympathy precisely because her strengths become her downfall. Even though Clarissa's exceptional virtues elevate her to the status of saint through her death, they do not secure her a satisfactory role in her society. The fallen woman is admired for her strengths, but the plot reinforces the limits of her power to the very end. In eliciting conflicts based on class struggles, middle-class morality, and female vulnerability, Richardson draws on the same conflicts that fuel the fallen woman's narrative. Clarissa's fate is that of a fallen woman.

The elements detailed above are similar to patterns and themes evident in other fallen women's narratives. In utilizing these features, Richardson appeals to his audience's enjoyment of the seduction plot and appeals to its sympathy for a victimized fallen woman. As Tom Keymer and Christina Marsden Gillis describe, Richardson was keenly aware of his audience's reading of the novel as he stretched out publication over an entire year and three volumes which capitalized on reader anticipation. Although drawing on some elements of the fallen woman's narrative, Richardson does not utilize the fallen woman's retrospective construction of her story and offers instead the account of events through letters.¹⁹

Although Richardson utilizes the themes and characterization common to the fallen woman's narrative, he contrasts the style of the fallen woman's narrative with his "new Species of Writing." But, as Margaret Ann Doody has noted, the importance of an author's use of sources lies in the way he or she adapts them and creates a unique work of

¹⁹ What Richardson did not expect, though, was an audience sympathetic to Lovelace, critical of Clarissa, and insistent upon a happy ending. He was quite upset by what he considered misreadings of his text. See Keymer for a detailed analysis of Richardson's relationship to his readers.

art from inherited patterns and models. Doody notes the importance not only of Richardson's sources but how he uses them.

The interest in tracing sources of Richardson's works, in finding analogues and possible influences, lies not in finding and cataloguing but in seeing what the novelist has done with his material. . . . Richardson has used material previously existing to create something new. The novelist has taken only those elements which he needs, and they are fused in the novel as a whole by a force which works with almost ferocious energy through characters and situations controlled by an artistic purpose never disregarded. When sources and conventions are traced, a striking difference in the kind of material used by the author for each novel becomes evident. (13)

In tracing the similarity of *Clarissa* to other examples of the fallen woman's narrative, I have observed that Richardson utilizes the patterns, subjects, and rhetoric found in the fallen woman's narrative as only one component of his work.

Writing Beyond the Fallen Woman's Narrative

Although the novel contains many elements found in the fallen woman's narrative, as detailed above, *Clarissa* lacks an essential component of a fallen woman's narrative, the first-person narration by the fallen woman that shapes the events of the seduction into a coherent narrative for a specific audience. The letters themselves do not convey Clarissa's story as a fallen woman's narrative. At the same time, the concern for the potential of Clarissa's first-person story plays an important role in the novel, particularly following the rape, when the desire for Clarissa's own account of events in a coherent narrative structure becomes a significant concern. The fallen woman's narrative, therefore, is present in *Clarissa*, and Richardson uses the request for Clarissa's story to emphasize the audience's desire for and expectations of a coherently structured narrative, a desire which he hopes to challenge with the originality of his own style.

As indicated above, the call for Clarissa's account of her experience in the form of a story rather than a sequence of letters reveals the way Richardson expects his audience

to read *Clarissa*. Fulfilling this request would require a different narrative form than that used in the letters themselves, and Clarissa is quite concerned with responding to this call for her fallen woman's narrative. Although she is not able to complete this narrative, the effort to construct a "true" account persists after her death in Belford's promise to edit the letters.

This desire for a fallen woman's narrative within what is already a seduction story demonstrates the unique features of the fallen woman's narrative that Richardson has adapted for his own method. Although the fallen woman's narrative utilizes the seduction plot, it contains much more than a specific set of characters and events (licentious libertine, vulnerable lady, the deception and corruption). It offers the perspective of the fallen woman herself, who, having survived her fall, structures her experience to elicit her audience's sympathy and serve as a model to other women.

But Richardson is offering something new, a technique he feels will have greater emotional and moral impact than a fallen woman's narrative has. While Clarissa's voice is strong in her letters, the novel actually contains multiple narrators, a feature of Richardson's unique contribution to the early epistolary novel. In this exchange primarily between Lovelace and Belford and between Clarissa and Anna, any coherent tale from Clarissa is fragmented by other characters' voices and competing versions of events. In addition to the variety of voices that diffuse the coherence of Clarissa's own tale, the immediacy of the letters, or Richardson's famous "writing to the moment," results in a narrative style dramatically different from that of a fallen woman's narrative.

Richardson's consciousness of the uniqueness of his technique and its contrast to the style of other narratives like the fallen woman's narrative is evident in the text itself. Richardson says in his preface that the letters are written "while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects" and contain "critical situations," "*instantaneous* descriptions and reflections," and "affecting Conversations"

(35). Richardson provides his own critical support of this new style through the words of Belford, who admires Clarissa's continual writing "in the midst of *present* distresses!" (a quotation he emphasizes in his 1759 preface). Belford contrasts this new method with more traditional narratives, such as the autobiographical form frequently used in fallen women's narratives:

How much more lively and affecting, for that reason, must the style be, than all that can be read in the dry, narrative, unanimated style of persons relating difficulties and dangers surmounted! The minds of such not labouring in suspense, not tortured by the pangs of uncertainty about events still hidden in the womb of fate; but on the contrary perfectly at ease; the relater unmoved by his own story, how then able to move the hearer or reader? (1178)

By consciously abandoning the narrative perspective common to other fallen women's narratives, Richardson offers a new method of focusing on present distresses. The repeated references to Clarissa's unfinished narrative after her rape further reinforce the uniqueness of the narrative provided through the letters themselves. Anna's and Mrs. Howe's repeated demands for Clarissa's story emphasize the distinction between the fallen woman's narrative and the new method Richardson is employing in fiction. Richardson never provides the reader with a carefully crafted first-person narrative, but the fact that its possibility plays such an important role in the conclusion of the text is a significant point to consider.

Constructing a Fallen Woman's Narrative

To understand how Richardson uses the fallen woman's narrative, it is necessary to examine the specific scenes where Clarissa is concerned with constructing the truth of her experience. In the following discussion, I have made a clear distinction between Clarissa's "writing to the moment" and her self-conscious attempts to reflect back on events and construct them into a coherent narrative. Because Richardson uses the word "Story" when Clarissa is either asked to recount her experience in a coherent narrative or

when Clarissa herself refers to constructing a coherent narrative of her experience, I use “story” and “narrative” in a similar manner.²⁰ Clarissa’s story would be different from her letters in its coherent structure, overt didactic purpose, and relationship to a broader audience, all the elements of narrativity crucial to the fallen woman’s narrative.

Audience seems like an odd distinction to make in a novel based on correspondence, which has a clear sense of audience at the core of each letter, yet I am interested in the audience beyond the recipient of each letter. The most obvious audience for this story is Clarissa’s community of friends and acquaintances, whose interest in her scandal is evident in the first paragraph of the first letter, when Anna tells Clarissa: “I know how it must hurt you to become the subject of the public talk; and yet upon an occasion so generally known it is impossible but that whatever relates to a young lady, whose distinguished merits have made her the public care, should engage everybody’s attention” (39). Anna also asks Clarissa to reflect on Lovelace’s attractiveness for a specific audience of friends—Miss Biddulph, Miss Lloyd, and Miss Campion—saying, “Miss Lloyd wished me to write to you upon it for your opinion; You know how much we all admire your opinion on such topics, which ever produces something new and instructive as you handle the subjects” (174). This broader audience of friends and acquaintances lurks behind Clarissa’s correspondence with Anna and is evident in Clarissa’s later concern for how her story will be received, for she is aware of both the public appetite for “whatever relates to a young lady” and the ways her experience has

²⁰ Narrative theorists use varying terms to distinguish between facts of experience and the pattern of a narrative. While narrative is a very broad term, I use it here to indicate the self-conscious effort to construct events into a story rather than a description of events in her letters, although I realize that both methods of writing involve the authorial selection, ordering, and interpretation involved in constructing any account of experience.

been interpreted. Castle views Clarissa's role as the subject of multiple interpretations as her function as a cipher in the text:

At the same time that Clarissa's own acts of interpretation are constrained by others, she is also, as I suggested at the outset, a text for everyone else's maniacal, irrepressible exegesis--their "cypher." According to their enigmatic desires, the Harlowes inscribe her with a range of oppressive meanings: "ungrateful" daughter, "perverse" sister, "fallen" woman. For Lovelace of course she is the reification of his banal fantasy "Woman"--weak, hypersexual, secretly enamored of the machinations of the "Rakish Confraternity." None of these readings of the heroine has any necessary connection to the body in question; Lovelace's infantile fiction of "Woman," for instance, has nothing to do with Clarissa, the woman. Each is strictly a function of a private vision. Yet she is powerless to controvert these "constructions" of her nature--a hermeneutic victim. (24)

Unfortunately for Clarissa, she is already interpreted even before she pens her narrative. Her attempts to convey her experience always fall short of someone's desires. As Castle points out, Clarissa's story, "while huge to the point of indecorousness, seems also perpetually incomplete" (36).²¹ In spite of or because of this narrative fragmentation, readers desire a coherent story, a common response when reading epistolary fiction. Castle asserts that "[w]hen we attempt to interpret the epistolary text, when we look for its 'Story,' we repeat the activity of characters attempting to decipher experience, reified, paradigmatically, in those smaller texts, the letters, which make up the larger text we read" (138). As John Dussinger notes, the desire for story, particularly in the form of a

²¹ Castle offers an interesting analysis of *Clarissa* as a fallen text:

Paradoxically, the more we read in the matter of *Clarissa*, the less we may feel we know of the heroine. She lies at the center of the fiction--a woman broken in upon by rape, by death--and the shape of her "Story" repeats the signs of violation, by gaps in its linguistic surface, and in its structure of meaning. Across the vast and peculiar narrative that bears her name, the truth about the heroine's history does not accumulate, but seems perpetually halved, disrupted, thrown into question. . . . Clarissa Harlowe is a fallen woman, and one "broken" by her fall. But one might also say that *Clarissa Harlowe* is a fallen text. It exposes on all levels the interruption, the disordering, of signification. It is hard to read. (36-37)

One could also say that the coherence of the fallen woman's narrative could have saved her reputation. In contrast, the fragmentation of the letters that comprise *Clarissa* replicates the physical violation the fallen woman experiences.

traditional seduction plot, is evident from the opening of *Clarissa*: “Whether Clarissa likes it or not, gossips have already inscribed her in their story of star-crossed love” (42). Gillis points out that Clarissa’s awareness of the interpretive desires of her audience ultimately influences her epistolary account. As Gillis states, “audiences determine performances” (99). Audience expectations for coherence and meaning are obvious and influential from the beginning.

In addition to this general audience for Clarissa’s story is Anna herself.²² Anna specifically requests a complete narrative from Clarissa, “Write to me therefore, my dear, the whole of your story” (40). Although Clarissa later thanks Anna for “the opportunity you have given me to tell my own story” and writes what she believes to be the truth of her heart (53), some of Anna’s expectations are clearly related to the seduction plot. Her interpretations of Clarissa’s unacknowledged attraction to Lovelace and her repeated encouragement that Clarissa marry Lovelace is surprising coming from the one reader who should know Clarissa the best. Clarissa herself comments on Anna’s sometimes forceful and erroneous interpretations of her motives:

Indeed, my beloved Miss Howe, I am ashamed to have your mamma say with ME in her view, “What strange effects have prepossession and love upon young creatures of our sex!” This touches me the more sensibly, because you yourself, my dear, are so ready to *persuade* me into it. . . . Treat me as freely as you will in all other respects, I will love you, as I have said, the better for your friendly freedom: but, methinks, I could be glad, for SEX’s sake, that you would not let this imputation [of love] pass so glibly from *your* pen, . . . since the *other* [sex]

²² Warner points out that the novel was initially to be published as “The Lady’s Legacy” and at Clarissa’s request (95). In the final draft, Richardson made the request for publication come from others, specifically Miss Howe, rather than from Clarissa herself.

Why does Richardson make this change? It is in keeping with Clarissa’s decision to produce her book by means of collaboration. Clarissa and Richardson know that urgent first-person attempts at self-justification often lead to the most strident and dubious forms of discourse. (95)

Warner’s comments could be associated with the fallen woman’s narrative and support my idea that Richardson used the basic formula of the fallen woman’s narrative but rejected it for his more immediate epistolary method and the power that was possible in that style, the very power that Warner is critiquing.

must have a *double* triumph, when a person of your delicacy . . . can give up a friend, with an exultation over her weakness, as a silly, love-sick creature! (135)

Castle sees in Anna an active reader, or “aggressive exegete” (77), who “writes Clarissa into an erotic scenario of her own devising” (78). Castle goes so far as to argue that Anna’s “reading” actually shapes Clarissa’s responses to Lovelace, influencing her to behave “in exactly the conventional manner of the enamoured and flirtatious young woman” (78). I disagree that Clarissa ever behaves like an “enamoured and flirtatious young woman,” even though she sometimes accuses herself of acting like the very giddy creatures she despises. At times, Clarissa directly rejects Anna’s imposition of romantic feelings on her, stating directly at one point, “Will you not question me about *throbs* and *glows*” (168). Although Anna does repeatedly place Clarissa’s experience into the framework of a seduction plot, she remains committed to Clarissa as a close friend. I do agree, though, that Anna, like the reader herself, is intrigued by the suspense of the possible seduction plot, a fascination that is also apparent in Mrs. Howe’s later request for Clarissa’s “Story.”

The more notable audience for Clarissa’s fallen woman’s story is Anna’s mother, whose initial interest in the details of Clarissa’s experience develops into a clear request for an account of events in the form of a fallen woman’s narrative. Early in the novel, Anna admits to Clarissa that she sometimes allows her mother to read the letters because of her curiosity and periodically comments on her mother’s reactions. While initially interested in Clarissa’s trials, Mrs. Howe’s sympathy wanes when the seriousness of Clarissa’s situation is evident and the conclusion of her fall has been determined. Her most heated denunciation follows Clarissa’s first contact with Anna after the rape.

If people who seek their own ruin could be the only sufferers by their headstrong doings, it were something: but, oh miss, miss, what have *you* to answer for, who have made as many grieved hearts as have known you? The whole sex is indeed wounded by you: for who but Miss Clarissa Harlowe was proposed by every father and mother for a pattern for their daughters? (975)

Mrs. Howe initially offers the standard social condemnation of a fallen woman, referencing the stock audience found in other fallen women's narratives, and demonstrating the paradigm shift that follows the rape from a suspenseful seduction tale to a didactic fallen woman's narrative. Clarissa herself is aware of the new shape of her tale: "My story is a dismal story. It has circumstances in it that would engage pity, and possibly a judgement not altogether unfavourable, were those circumstances known" (976). Clarissa refers to the basic elements of the fallen woman's narrative, which she could use to convey the truth of her experience as well as shape people's reactions to her circumstances.

Although initially prohibiting future correspondence between the young women. Mrs. Howe becomes an involved reader of Clarissa's fallen woman's story when she recognizes the potential story or fallen woman's narrative in Clarissa's experience. As the passage above suggests, her own personal interest in and the broader audience's concern for Clarissa's ruin will be as great as it had been for her virtue. Anna later relays her mother's request for a complete account:

She [Mrs. Howe] has so much real concern for your misfortunes that, thinking it will be a consolation to *you*, and that it will oblige *me*, she consents that you shall write to me the *particulars at large of your sad story*: but it is on condition that I show her all that has passed between us relating to yourself and the vilest of men. I have the more cheerfully complied, as the communication cannot be to your disadvantage. You may therefore write freely, and direct to our own house. (995)

This request sets the stage for the shift from Clarissa's correspondence to her efforts to construct a fallen woman's narrative, which will demand additional writing from that devoted to her letters, as Clarissa herself notes: "As I shall not be able, perhaps, to conclude what I have to write in even two or three letters, I will begin a new one with my story; and send the whole of it together, although written at different periods, as I am able" (997). Clarissa establishes that the construction of the "whole story" will require an

approach much different from her “writing to the moment” in her letters. She realizes she is faced with a difficult task:

As you are so earnest to have all the particulars of my sad story before you, I will, if life and spirits be lent me, give you an *ample account of all that has befallen me* [emphasis mine] from the time you mention. But this, it is very probable, you will not see till after the close of my last scene: and as I shall write with a view to that, I hope no other voucher will be wanted for the veracity of the writer. (1018)

Clarissa is aware that her fallen woman’s narrative, the whole story, will involve not only the circumstances but also the consequences of her fall.

Clarissa’s reference to her story and the request to structure a coherent narrative is reinforced by Mrs. Howe’s desire to publish Clarissa’s history, as Anna conveys to Clarissa:

You are, it seems (and that too much for your health), employed in writing. I hope it is in penning down the particulars of your *tragical story*. And my mother has put me in mind to press you to it, with a view that one day, if it might be *published under feigned names*, it would be of as much use as honour to the sex. My mother says she cannot help admiring you for the propriety of your resentment in your refusal of the wretch; and she would be extremely glad to have *her advice of penning your sad story* complied with [all emphases mine]. (1152)

This transformation of Clarissa’s experience into narrative becomes a command rather than a mere request based on personal interest. At this point in the story, the reader cannot help but feel that Mrs. Howe’s pressure and Anna’s willing conveyance of it are somewhat inappropriate considering Clarissa’s ill health. As happens throughout the novel, though, more interest exists in Clarissa as text, as story, rather than Clarissa as a person.

A more general interest in a coherent account of Clarissa’s story is also evident as her death nears. After Clarissa’s rape and escape from Lovelace, the people who surround her become her first audiences, although she herself is unable to tell her story. Belford ends up responding to requests for Clarissa’s story from Mr. Goddard and the doctor, who have a “great curiosity to know something more of her story” (1082). Later

that day, Mrs. Lovick and Mrs. Smith “again wanted to know her story” (1083). In each case, Belford offers a brief summary of Clarissa’s circumstances: “that she had been very vilely treated; deserved it not; and was all innocence and purity” (1083). In some ways, Belford’s synopsis very aptly describes the basic theme of any fallen woman’s narrative. While Belford’s accounts of Clarissa’s story do not qualify as a fallen woman’s narrative, they do emphasize an interest in her story, an interest that is reiterated throughout the novel. Even Col. Morden, frustrated at his inability to help Clarissa, wishes Belford could “apprise him of the whole mournful story” (1357). In this case, the “whole story” is what moves Morden to challenge Lovelace to a duel.

So Clarissa is asked to construct a fallen woman’s narrative in her own voice, with a particular plot, style, and theme. As is evident in the passages above, Clarissa’s awareness of her audience is intertwined with her awareness of the effect her story may have. She clearly hopes, as many fallen women do when they tell their stories, that her story will serve personal as well as didactic purposes: to justify her own actions, warn other women against a similar fate, and reform rakes like Lovelace and Belford. As Clarissa writes about the process of constructing her story for a particular audience, she suggests that presenting her experience in the form of a narrative will convey the truth. As she loses social and physical power due to her rape, Clarissa finds it imperative that society learn the truth of what happened.

An Effect Beyond the Fallen Woman’s Narrative

References to and demands for Clarissa’s “Story” are evidence of a narrative coherence that is missing from human experience and, as many critics note, from the epistolary genre. Part of this focus on coherence is a concern for arranging experience into a meaningful pattern with clear cause and effect and a transparent meaning, elements at the heart of every fallen woman’s narrative. Although Richardson rejects the “Story”

form of the fallen woman's narrative, he does not relinquish his didactic goals. As noted above, Richardson attempts to achieve his didactic purpose with a radically new method that would engage his audience in the moral dilemmas of the epistolary exchange in a way that an overtly didactic autobiographical narrative could not. But the desire for a coherent story to serve as the summative account and final testimony to the truth is still evident in Clarissa's and others' desire for a "Story." In his 1748 preface, Richardson states that one of his readers advised him to give a "narrative turn to the letters," while others "insisted that the story could not be reduced to a dramatic unity, nor thrown into the narrative way, without divesting it of its warmth and a great part of its efficacy" (Ross 36). He again notes this interest in the "Story" in his 1759 preface:

From what has been said, considerate Readers will not enter upon the perusal of the Piece before them, as if it were designed *only* to divert and amuse. It will probably be thought tedious to all such as *dip* into it, expecting a *light Novel*, or *transitory Romance*; and look upon Story in it (interesting as that is generally allowed to be) as its *sole end*, rather than as a vehicle to the Instruction. (Sherburn xxi)

Richardson directly acknowledges the power of "Story," but he points readers to his more significant didactic purpose: "To investigate the highest and most important Doctrines not only of Morality, but of Christianity" (xx). Richardson satisfies that purpose with the immediate account of experience found in the epistolary genre, and he establishes an interest in Clarissa's situation that he sincerely hopes will lead to a concern for the didactic effect her story might have on others. While Richardson recognizes that the exchange of letters might not be as accessible as the "Story" his readers desire, he very consciously incorporates this desire into his multivocal and fragmented epistolary narrative. By presenting the desire for the coherence of a potential fallen woman's narrative from Clarissa and not directly fulfilling it, Richardson satisfies the desire for

narrative with his own style. In writing beyond the fallen woman's narrative, Richardson achieves an effect even greater than that of the fallen woman's narrative.²³

Richardson's goals for his story are quite apparent, although critics have noted that the epistolary technique he develops results in a more complex and sometimes ambivalent portrayal of his subject than his preface, postscript, and personal correspondence indicate. Keymer and others detail Richardson's obsessive effort to control the impact of his story on readers, an effort often frustrated by the tastes of his audience. Critics have also noted that Clarissa's motives are much more complex than her stated objective to serve as an example and warning to other young women who may fall into a trap similar to her own, the standard message of the fallen woman's narrative. Her letters, inscriptions on her coffin, will, posthumous letter, and edited letters all reveal an awareness of the power language can have for a powerless woman in eighteenth-century England. In a society that is quick to judge her fallen and that offers few avenues to public self-representation, her "Story" may be all she has.

Critics offer several possible purposes for Clarissa's story, although none specify the features of the fallen woman's narrative. In his analysis of Clarissa's exchanges with Mrs. Howe about her "story," Warner asserts that Clarissa's immediate goal is to recreate herself through narrative. When Clarissa first contacts Anna after the rape, she "points backward to the story of her fall, and there she finds an opening for self-justification"

²³ Consciously or unconsciously, though, Richardson has built into his text a subversive desire that he does not (and some suggest cannot) fulfill. Castle notes that Clarissa's repeated references to the story that she might tell reveal a sense of futility that may be felt by the reader as well:

These letters (which we, like the Harlowes, read after she has died) together make up an odd kind of nonstatement: they do not tell the "Story" of her experience, but only allude to a narrative that *might* be written in another time and place and (now obviously) by another hand. Clarissa herself cannot write it. (128)

Castle's assertion highlights the difference between Richardson's epistolary narrative and the fallen woman's narrative I identify as present/absent in the text.

(92). Warner asserts that “[i]n the interval between her rape and the escape from Sinclair’s, Clarissa finds a new form in which to embody the subject--the story she will eventually have cast into a book” (92). The story structure Warner describes is similar to the fallen woman’s narrative paradigm:

The magnitude of her fall imbues all the details of her past with new interest. A narrative of events has always been an adjunct of Clarissa’s representation of her life. But now hierarchies are inverted so the whole pathos of her present life gains its importance from the frame it offers for her story. The story and the book become the sole forms to embody Clarissa’s subject, and sacrificing the old “self,” the old virgin body, and any future as a living subject, are the necessary preliminary steps in the institution of the book called “The History of Clarissa Harlowe.” (93)

Fortunately for Clarissa, the forms of fiction can also allow her to use the fallen woman’s narrative to justify herself and construct a more positive analysis of her experience and condemnation of a society that allows her no other alternatives than to depend on the protection of her virginity under the control of the men around her.²⁴

What Warner sees as self-aggrandizement, Flynn interprets as revenge and didacticism. Like Warner, Flynn recognizes that Clarissa’s story could influence society’s perception of her. Looking first at her letters following the rape, Flynn suggests that Clarissa writes to regain power over the situation: “In her letters, Clarissa is creating a new self, without shame and without violation” (254). In this new story and in her death, Clarissa assumes “the role of the violated virgin” and “insures that society will not view

²⁴ I would argue that Clarissa turns to story because her body has been violated in a society that offers her no other means of recrimination, and I would disagree with Warner’s interpretation of this as more evidence of Clarissa’s manipulation. Warner suggests that, in relating her story, Clarissa will give herself central position and others will only be involved as antagonists: “she must not let so much of the world--with its worldly wisdom--into her account that her life appears to be nothing more than the seduction and death of yet another inexperienced young girl” (102). Warner interprets Clarissa’s narrative power as manipulation: “But Clarissa’s life does not *begin* as a story, and we must look into the quantities of clever shaping that make it look like one” (104). Warner, emphasizing Clarissa’s “clever shaping,” mistrusts her objectives, because he does not sufficiently acknowledge the historical reality of her limitations.

sexual violation in the same way again” (255). This very public function of Clarissa’s “Story,” which Gillis argues is the logical outcome of any epistolary effort and I would suggest is the outcome of any narrative effort, serves an important didactic purpose. As Flynn describes: “Preparing her papers, her truly large and complete composition of self-vindication, Clarissa regards herself as pattern more than person” (34). Flynn later notes that Clarissa’s “composition of self-vindication” would follow the pattern of the very popular “apologies” of the time, a “memoir that in ‘real life’ would have created an infamous stir” and would have incurred Richardson’s disgust (114). While Flynn is referring to Clarissa’s final edited letters as a substitute memoir, I would suggest that her first attempt to construct a coherent fallen woman’s narrative at Mrs. Howe’s insistence also serves this objective.

Clarissa’s regard for her reputation precedes her efforts to construct her story as a fallen woman’s narrative. From the beginning, Clarissa worries how people will judge her when they lack a complete account:

for could the giddiest and most inconsiderate girl in *England* have done worse than I shall appear to have done in the eye of the world? Since my crime will be known without the provocations, and without the artifices of the betrayer too. . . ; while it will be a high aggravation, that better things were expected from me than from many others. (382)

While she notes that society expects more from her than it may from other women, she also points out the need for the truth to be told. Lovelace himself is aware that his reputation as a libertine has been enough to ruin Clarissa’s reputation, even before the rape: “She has already incurred the censure of the world. She must therefore choose to be mine for the sake of soldering up her reputation in the eye of that impudent world” (575). Her family is the quickest to judge her fallen, and even goes so far as to inquire about the possibility of her being pregnant. Clarissa challenges her family’s interest in those circumstances when they were not concerned about the circumstances that forced

her into Lovelace's power: "Why, why, sir, were not other inquiries made of me, as well as this shocking one?" (1197). When viewing a potential fallen woman, the assumption of guilt is too great and the possibilities for redemption too limited to remain silent about her situation.

These same circumstances, though, will become the source of her later triumph over Lovelace through words. As she indicates to Mrs. Howe, the circumstances of her fall might actually engage pity rather than condemnation, pity which Mrs. Howe herself is moved to feel as she learns more of Clarissa's story. This awareness of the sympathy her "Story" might elicit is an important element in her desire to write a separate fallen woman's narrative. Clarissa repeats at a later point to her friend Mrs. Norton that "when my story is known, I shall be entitled to more compassion than blame, even on the score of going away with Mr. Lovelace" (986). Like other fallen women's narratives, Clarissa's "Story" will attempt to elicit compassion.

Clarissa hopes her narrative will have the power to justify her own position, repair some of her family's reputation, and warn other women against similar situations.

Another goal would be to reform rakes. She says of Belford:

Who knows but that the man who already, from a principle of humanity, is touched at my misfortunes, when he comes to revolve the whole story placed before him in one strong light, and when he shall have the catastrophe likewise before him; and shall become in a manner interested in it: who knows but that, from a still higher principle, he may so regulate his future actions as to find his own reward in the everlasting welfare which is wished him by his / Obligated servant,/ CLARISSA HARLOWE? (1177)

In fact, Belford does reform. While Clarissa repeatedly expresses her hopes for Lovelace's reform as well, he never demonstrates the consistent change of heart that Belford shows. But, if he can make such a change, Clarissa's words would be part of that reformation. Lovelace tells Belford he intends to read her final will like he would a bible: "that, and her posthumous letter, shall be my study; and they will prepare me for being

your disciple” (1463). Although Lovelace’s declaration suggests that Clarissa’s power may extend from beyond the grave through her words, Lovelace’s inability to remain a serious convert is evident two paragraphs later when he tells Belford that he doesn’t anticipate abandoning his libertine behavior: “That I will not take a few liberties, and that I will not try to start some of my former game, I won’t promise—Habits are not easily shaken off—but they shall be by way of weaning. So *return* and *reform* shall go together” (1463). Clarissa’s power over Lovelace’s reform is limited. Even though her words have no final authority over his spirit, she does influence him up to the end of his life. In his final fevered hours he appears tormented by her ghost and concerned for his own soul, ending his life with the words, “LET THIS EXPIATE” (1488).

If Clarissa were able to write a fallen woman’s narrative, it might not only affect people’s perception of her, but also provide her with the power to convey a truth that social reality (law, decorum, judgmental attitudes, family disowning her, etc.) otherwise prohibits. As is typical in a fallen woman’s narrative, one of the desired effects is that the story can serve as a warning to other young women. Clarissa, who was seen as a model of virtue, now hopes to become a warning against vice. For Clarissa, the only means to achieve this is to present her story as honestly as possible. For others, the legal system is suggested as a means of telling the truth, but more important, punishing Lovelace for his crimes. Mrs. Howe is the first to suggest that Clarissa tell her story in court, suggesting that, if she does not, she will be “answerable for all the mischiefs he may do in the course of his future villainous life” (1016). She further proposes that

if Miss Clarissa Harlowe could be so indifferent about having this public justice done upon such a wretch, for her *own* sake, she ought to overcome her scruples out of regard to her family, her acquaintance, and her sex, which are all highly injured and scandalized by his villainy to her. (1017)

Society (family, friends, women in general) is more concerned about the way Clarissa’s fall reflects on its attitudes and standards rather than its immediate effect on Clarissa.

Clarissa simply rejects the proposal, saying that she “would sooner suffer every evil (the repetition of the capital one [rape] excepted) than appear publicly in a court to do myself justice” (1019). She stands her ground later when the same suggestion is made by her respected friend, Dr. Lewin. He, like Mrs. Howe, is concerned for her family’s honor and suggests that she either marry Lovelace or prosecute him. Unlike Mrs. Howe, Dr. Lewin recognizes Clarissa’s primary fear of “telling so shocking a story in public court,” but he feels that the absence of any retribution would be even worse (1252).

While Clarissa is very concerned that the truth be told, she is acutely aware of the limits of her voice in her society. In her response to Dr. Lewin, she points out that Lovelace may not be found guilty.²⁵ Even if he were found guilty and sentenced to death, he could very easily be pardoned due to his wealth and power. With these limitations in mind, Clarissa concludes that her written story may provide the only reparation possible to her family and friends:

Miss Howe is solicitous to have all those letters and materials preserved, which will set my *whole story* [emphasis mine] on a true light. . . . The warning

²⁵ Clarissa’s assessment of her limited legal power is supported by Bell’s discussion of rape in *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*. Flynn also offers some important historical information related to rape. “Under English law in the eighteenth century, victims of rape were considered in two categories, as victims of sexual molestation and as victims of property theft” (109). Flynn’s discussion reinforces how closely female sexuality was linked to property and the primogeniture system.

Another detail relevant to Clarissa’s refusal to prosecute is that, in order to be considered rape, it had to be proven that intercourse took place without the woman’s consent, and any sign of accepting the circumstances implied consent. A victim with any compromising circumstances would not be believed, and Clarissa was aware that her circumstances were very compromising. Clarissa is also aware of the assumption that women couldn’t really be raped without some degree of consent. In addition, a rape victim had to report her rape as soon as possible, which, in Clarissa’s case, was impossible because of Lovelace’s imprisonment of her. According to Frank McLynn, a woman could not have a strong case if the rape went unreported for more than twenty-four hours, if she did not struggle or cry out, if she had a previously questionable reputation or known sexual experience. Because of the limited potential for success, few women ever prosecuted for rape (106).

that may be given from those papers to all such young creatures as may have known or heard of me, may be more efficacious, as I humbly presume to think, to the end wished for, than my appearance could have been in a court of justice, pursuing a doubtful event under the disadvantages I have mentioned. (1254-55)

While her failure to prosecute Lovelace might taint interpretations of her story, a fallen woman's narrative could be an avenue to redemption in the eyes of society. Immediately following her response to Dr. Lewin's proposal, Clarissa receives a letter from her sister Arabella also urging her to prosecute Lovelace, "to do *yourself*, and *us*, and your *sex*, this justice" (1256), or to go to Pennsylvania for several years until the scandal has blown over and she has proven herself "a true and uniform penitent" (1256), at which time she could claim her inheritance. For the practical-minded reader, America would appear to be Clarissa's best option, but for Clarissa, this would be a compromise and would require avoiding the truth rather than confronting it. For Clarissa, the truth is her only power, and the fallen woman's narrative appears to be a possible means of achieving that power with the least risk to herself.

In spite of the evidence that Clarissa's fallen woman's narrative would serve an important purpose, she never completes her "Story." Because Clarissa's virtue is universally acknowledged through other accounts of her integrity, the shortcomings of the fallen woman's narrative are evident. In fact, Clarissa's eager anticipation of death suggests that she doubts that a "Story" can actually provide her access to a happy and productive life. Although the fallen woman's narrative may elicit sympathy, actual circumstances rarely change. Clarissa herself recognizes the limits of sympathy in a society that values chastity, in reality and reputation. As she says about her family:

And after all, what can they do for me?--They can only pity me: and what will that do but augment their own *grief*; to which, at present, their *resentment* is an alleviation? For can they by their pity restore to me my lost reputation? Can they by it purchase a sponge that will wipe out from the year past the fatal five months of my life? (1140)

Clarissa recognizes the condition in which many fallen women find themselves: once fallen, always fallen (in an ironic parallel to Lovelace's libertine maxim: "once subdued, always subdued"). Given the circumstances of her time, a fallen woman's options are limited, and, while her story may elicit greater understanding of her role in the seduction, forgiveness for her "true penitent spirit" (1140), and sympathy for her pain, she concludes that a story may do little to change her status or provide new options for her socially. As she points out to Anna after relating the circumstances surrounding her rape, "But since my character *before* the capital enormity was lost in the eye of the world; and that from the very hour I left my father's house; and since all my own hopes of worldly happiness are entirely over; let me slide quietly into my grave" (1013).

Because the perception of her fallenness precludes any viable options for her future, sympathy for Clarissa does not bring her any immediate power, change her mind about death, or give her the will to live. Belford, the doctor, and Anna, all do their best to convince Clarissa that she is not to blame for her fall. Anna begs Clarissa not to "give way" to dejection and to "[c]omfort [herself], on the contrary, in the triumphs of a virtue unsullied; a will wholly faultless" (1020), but Clarissa does blame herself and cannot face life as a fallen woman. While concerned with providing a truthful account of her fall, she sees death as her most satisfying option. Instead of writing a fallen woman's narrative, Clarissa allows her final testimony to come from a collection of letters, symbols on her coffin, her will, and her posthumous letters. While these texts effectively inspire sympathy for Clarissa's fate, they deny her any central narrative authority much as Richardson denies his own role as controlling narrator within the narrative itself.

Because of the importance of her story and the truth of her fall, Clarissa does what she can to insure that people will understand her position after she has died. To this end, as mentioned above, she designs her coffin and will as moving testimony to her virtue. As Col. Morden's letters detail, the coffin has a powerful effect on her family as well as

on those in the community who watch as the coffin is carried into Harlowe Place and to the burial ground. The will, a testimony to her generosity and gracious forgiveness, moves its recipients and readers to tears. She is further concerned that her letters be compiled to convey the story she is unable to complete before her death, and she solicits Belford's assistance. As she tells Belford: "It behoves me to leave behind me such an account as may clear up my conduct to several of my friends who will not at present concern themselves about me: and Miss Howe, and her mother, are very solicitous that I will do so" (1173). Clarissa's primary objective is to share what she sees as the truth of her experience.

While these final expressions could be seen as Clarissa's attempt to control other people's perceptions of her, many critics see Clarissa's powerlessness paralleled by her final renunciation of her own narrative and by her death.²⁶ Castle focuses her analysis on the political struggle for interpretation in *Clarissa*: "it is a conflict in which Clarissa, the child-woman, is inevitably the loser" (22). Ultimately, Clarissa's voice is silenced by other people's interpretations, a situation most poignantly evident in the final edition of letters which, unlike a fallen woman's narrative would, offers Lovelace's powerful voice as well as her own. Castle emphasizes Clarissa's very real victimization at several levels as her story is ultimately lost to competing interpretations: "At the most primitive level, she is excluded from speech by those around her. She must struggle to speak, to tell her own 'Story.' This 'Story'—the one Anna requests in the first letter of *Clarissa*—is doomed to suppression, interruption, incompleteness" (22). She is victimized by the

²⁶ Critics suggest that at the end of the novel Clarissa is consciously turning herself into symbol rather than person. Flynn notes her use of allegory and inscriptions on the coffin (180). Believing completely in the values of her society, she acts in a way that leaves her only a metaphor: "Clarissa personifies the metaphor of her society: tragically, she believes in chastity and acts on her belief in spite of the compromises urged upon her by a worldly society that values appearances" (Flynn 180).

physical imprisonment she experiences at Harlowe Place and at Mrs. Sinclair's brothel, by the restrictions on and violations of her correspondence, and by "that literal silencing—crudely, by an opiate—which results in the violation of her body itself" (22). It is only fitting then that Clarissa abandons her attempt to offer her own interpretation of her experience in a fallen woman's narrative. Clarissa's "Story" is precluded by these others' interpretations and subsequent silencing of her:

Clarissa's "Story" is what never really gets told in *Clarissa*; it is that text which is always interrupted, suspended, fragmented by the texts of others. That which we might at first assume to be her "Story"—the vast collection of letters, the fiction itself—is obviously no story in the conventional sense. Rather, it is a contradictory, roiling, multivocal system: more a concatenation of possible narratives told by different tellers, of whom the heroine is only one. The multiple-correspondent epistolary text is not a simple discourse—never, as Richardson himself held it to be, the transparent "History of a Young Lady," but a congeries, a cluster of disparate discourses. (Castle 27)

In some ways, the competing voices provided by Richardson's epistolary technique offer an account of events closer to lived experience than Clarissa's single-focused, first-person narrative could. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the final collection of letters is shaped by and contained in male-constructed texts (specifically in Lovelace's letters as well as Belford's and Richardson's editions). Castle's central argument is that a woman's effort to shape experience through narrative is silenced.

Castle connects Clarissa's silence with her powerlessness in society. As Castle emphasizes, this hermeneutic powerlessness has direct correlation to the historical circumstances of eighteenth-century women:

Clarissa's powerlessness, figured first as exclusion from realism of articulation (a loss equivalent finally to the lack of freedom to tell her own "Story" or interpret the world on her own terms) models in little a historical condition of women in patriarchal cultures. Her linguistic oppression is linked to other sorts of oppression: economic, social, psychological—and most basically—vulnerability to physical abuse, archetypally confirmed in the ancient violence of rape itself. The crucial importance of violation in Clarissa's history is not that it has so much to do with an isolated and sentimentalized theme of female "Virtue," but that it points to a larger, multileveled pattern of sexual and political exploitation. (116)

Aware of her social powerlessness, most graphically represented by her rape, Clarissa abandons the power she once believed language could give her. Castle observes, “Clarissa’s physical trauma is epiphanic: it makes her conscious, as nothing else has done, of the politics of meaning in which she has been caught, the insufficiency of her own readings,” and in many ways of her inability to interpret her circumstances (109).

As a result, Clarissa sees no purpose in her own version of events:

Discovering the arbitrariness of human constructs, she also discovers that her own readings have no privileged force. Her “construction” of events, even of the nature of her own desire, cannot contend with the brutal and devious readings of others—she is powerless against them and their implications. (Castle 59)

Although Clarissa’s awareness of the futility of her own interpretation could be one reason why she gives up on writing a fallen woman’s narrative, her near obsession with preparing the many testimonies to herself prior to her death suggest her confidence in some degree of influence over her community and the reader, even as she anticipates her spiritual salvation through death.

Eagleton also considers Clarissa’s death as a refusal of what society offers her, a refusal I see paralleled in her relinquishing of her “Story” to Belford. Seeing Clarissa herself as the significant body missing in the text, Eagleton describes her as the “signifier which distributes to others their positions of power or desire, fixing them in some fraught relation to her own mysteriously inviolable being” (56). The meaning lies in the hands (or desires) of the interpreter. When Clarissa claims at the end of the novel that she is “nobody’s,” she is offering:

a radical refusal of any place within the “symbolic order”, a rebuffing of all patriarchal claims over her person. The dying Clarissa is nothing, errant, schizoid, a mere empty place and nonperson; her body occasions writing—her will, the whole text of the novel—but is itself absent from it, and will be literally nothing when we come to read the book. (62)

It is fitting that Clarissa’s refusal of life accompanies her refusal to write her own story for the very society that limits her power.

Rather than focusing on a refusal of society's definitions, Dussinger sees in Clarissa's final silence and death denial of narrative coherence or the possibility of conveying the "whole story."

Unless at the simple level of communication once enjoyed, say, with her grandfather, circumstances almost always prevent the frank discourse that Clarissa believes is her wont. For instance, the difficulty, if not impossibility, of ever telling her story to the world becomes painfully apparent at the time of her arrest for . . . debts, with numerous onlookers to add to the public disgrace. . . . But when she is brought up close to even the most disinterested public, her exposure reveals only the futility of telling the "whole story" to the most sympathetic audience. (48)

This interpretation of Clarissa's rejection of a coherent narrative is echoed by Von Sabine Volk-Birke, in his article "'I Will Recite Facts Only. . .': Letters, Narrative, and Reality in Richardson's *Clarissa*." Noting that Clarissa originally believes that her narrative will mirror her experience, Volk-Birke argues that Clarissa matures and recognizes the limits of her narrative ability:

She has given up authenticating her identity with narrative, realizing that she can only make her point by actions now. Were she to marry Lovelace, she would indicate that she accepted the conventional reading of her story—a young girl whose lack of prudence (to say the least) led to her seduction is saved from dishonour by the seducer's condescension to do the honourable thing and make an honest woman [sic] of her. She must refuse him in order to testify for her innocence and for her identity, demonstrating that her case cannot be fitted into the cliché mould of the seduction story which provides most of her contemporaries with their clues how to read her fate. (340-41)

She initially refuses to marry Lovelace because she rejects the expectations of the seduction plot; at the end, she repudiates the transforming power of a fallen woman's narrative as well. Although she desires to authenticate what has happened to her, a mere "Story" will not be adequate.

Volk-Birke accounts for Clarissa's promise and failure to write this narrative as indicative of her religious faith as well as her narrative doubts: "She does not consider her own account of the events important any more, not just because her faith in narrative is deeply shaken, but also because her most important concern is her soul and her

relationship with God” (340). Volk-Birke concludes with an interpretation of Clarissa’s rejection of the fallen woman’s narrative for the accounts provided by her coffin, her will, and her death:

Having experienced the helplessness and vulnerability of the human condition [more importantly the female condition], Clarissa learns that she must rely exclusively on God. He alone can read her life, he alone can authenticate it. And for him, she does not have to write her own history. The inscriptions on her coffin are her last attempt at signs that can be deciphered by human eyes. Significantly enough, they rely on emblems, and on sacred texts, not on Clarissa’s own words. She writes no longer to explain her life, but to express the manner of her death and the nature of her hope. Her language has changed from assertions of the truth of an individual history to a profession of belief in the truth of a general faith which mercifully redeems her individual temporal unhappiness, receiving her into eternal bliss. (342)

Whether interpreting Clarissa’s refusal to write a separate narrative and rely instead on Belford’s edition of letters as the result of her physical, political, hermeneutical, or spiritual condition, the common thread in the criticism is her rejection of the opportunity to defend herself in an environment that offers her few options.

The form of and context for the fallen woman’s narrative suggests a desire to be not only vindicated but also redeemed in society’s eyes. Her own story would provide access to a place in society, a society which she now rejects. Gillis points out that actually rewriting her story would cause further pain and conflict, pain Clarissa would rather relinquish. By not writing a fallen woman’s narrative, Clarissa says she hopes to “be freed from pain of recollecting things that [her] soul is vexed at; and this at a time when its tumults should be allayed in order to make way for the most important preparation” (1176-77). The fallen woman’s narrative requires reflection and interpretation. According to Gillis, this process would impede her spiritual preparations for death and require too much engagement with society, with her audience, relationships that have defeated her, relationships she now rejects.

Upon abandoning an autobiographical narrative self-defense, Clarissa relies on narrative forms that do not presume the public authority claimed by a narrative like the fallen woman's narrative. Instead of Clarissa herself, Belford provides a direct connection to the public that has condemned her: "Belford represents the function of novelist and novel, changing the so-called authentic utterance by placing it within a larger structure" (Gillis 84). In fact, Clarissa sees her abnegation of the role of narrator as further evidence of her innocence.²⁷ As Clarissa tells Belford, "It will be an honour to my memory, with all those who shall know that I was so well satisfied of my innocence, that *having not time to write my own Story* [emphasis mine], I could entrust it to the relation which the destroyer of my fame and fortunes has given of it" (1176). Unable or unwilling to assume the role of narrator, Clarissa argues for the superior form of her story in an epistolary collection. Gillis points out that epistolary efforts are concerned with offering a narrative different from a structured story:

The very negation of premeditation and story making in epistolary fiction exalts the private and the separate, the isolation of language within time, text, and consciousness endowing separateness itself with moral value: what is separate is the "real thing," the authentic. Letters, according to this rhetoric, are documents, faithful records of the individual heart. (8)

As Richardson states in his preface, he self-consciously rejects a structured narrative for his "writing to the moment."²⁸ This shift from the coherent story to the epistolary account

²⁷ Gillis's *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolary Form in Clarissa* provides a helpful analysis of the way letters in epistolary novels, and *Clarissa* in particular, function to create the private self (the physically removed or isolated self) and at the same time open or release the self to someone else in a very public way. She argues that both the sense of private self-expression and public communication are inherent in any letter. At the same time, she recognizes that this public function, although a part of Clarissa's consciousness while writing, is actually fulfilled by Belford's edition, which I see as a replacement for the fallen woman's narrative.

²⁸ Castle discusses Richardson's own insecurity with his voice as a narrator. She cites a letter in which he responds to critiques of his literary method:

"Some have wished that the Story had been told in the usual narrative way of telling Stories designed to amuse and divert, and not in Letters written by the

provides internal support of Richardson's own project. As we see in the final scenes where Belford and Clarissa's family read parts of her letters, the epistolary account can have great power over others, the same power felt by the reader herself. What need is there for a "Story" when these powerful letters are much more suspenseful and just as instructive. Therefore, abandoning her fallen woman's narrative does not mean abandoning the potential didactic effect. Like Richardson's own text, the edited version by Belford will aim to reveal the true evils of Clarissa's situation by engaging the audience in the moral dilemma recreated by each letter.²⁹

For Clarissa's objectives and for Richardson's own narrative technique, Belford plays a significant role in the transmission of the letters from private correspondence to public model. Belford assumes the role of editor rather than narrator. As Gillis notes, Belford is "preeminently, however, the executor, mediating between the heroine and her public, disposing not only of Clarissa's worldly goods but, most important, of her letters. He will see that the story is told, completing the work that Clarissa herself has begun" (82). In this role, Belford's power to shape interpretations of events is clear, since the

respective Persons whose history is given in them. The author thinks he ought not to prescribe to the taste of others; but imagined himself at liberty to follow his own. He perhaps mistrusted his talents for the narrative kind of writing." (179) This absence of the "narrative kind of writing" also applies to the absence of the fallen woman's narrative within *Clarissa*.

²⁹ Flynn sees Richardson's use of letters as a way of engaging the reader more directly: "Through an intricate epistolary network, Richardson forces us into his fictional world. Barriers between life and art dissolve" (267). In order to achieve this effect, Flynn argues that Richardson emphasizes the typography of his letters and makes readers aware of the very physical reality of the letters, an aspect further emphasized by Belford's edition of Clarissa's and Lovelace's letters. "When Belford assumes the editorship of the novel known as *Clarissa*, we suddenly find ourselves in the process of reading letters that describe the making of the book we are reading" (Flynn 270). Flynn also notes that Belford's role in the last part of the book provides a way for readers to justify their involvement in the entire seduction, for they have been implicated in the process of reading, just as Belford has been. As he atones for his sin at the end by assisting Clarissa, so does the reader (273).

reader is already aware that some of the correspondents have been manipulated and deceived. In spite of this potential distortion, Belford provides a coherence and authority missing from the epistolary technique:

Hence the function of Belford, that rather pedestrian everyman, is crucial in *Clarissa*. Just as Belford assumes an active role in the novel when he records Clarissa's escape from the confinement of Mrs. Sinclair's house and "write[s] at large all particulars" . . . , so does he, acting as the novelist's own surrogate, effect the double exposure by making all the letters available to a larger audience. He is the opener/collector who corrects and completes our reading, (Gillis 82)

Gillis sees Belford's editing of the letters as an important and unique aspect of Richardson's novelistic contribution.

Although Belford's final edition and the edited letters that the reader holds can powerfully convey Clarissa's story, Belford's edition is still a substitute for Clarissa's own voice and further evidence of the social limits that silence Clarissa and contribute to her death. The inclusion of Lovelace's voice also reveals the complications that Richardson's multivocal text offers. In moving beyond the narrative control of the autobiographical voice and beyond clear didactic statements within the text itself, the collection of letters diffuses narrative control.³⁰ Although the collection of letters has a certain power, Lovelace's letters within the collection also have the potential to subvert Clarissa's objectives. As Keymer points out, Lovelace's libertinism is duplicated by a

³⁰ Warner sees Belford's edition as further evidence of Clarissa's manipulative power. According to Warner, Clarissa's final story, edited by Belford, is her final act of power: "The book involves a quantum leap in the art of self-representation, for it attempts to fix the meaning of Clarissa's life and story for all time" (75). No longer reacting to circumstances, Clarissa attempts to control perceptions of circumstances after her rape:

After the rape Clarissa goes from being an agile tactician of self-representation to being a master-builder. By building a book, and putting her friends and adversaries *in* her book, she tries to assume a Godlike authority and dominion over them. She will be the center and subject that reigns over a multiplicity of objects. (75)

Although Clarissa is always the "center and subject" of Richardson's novel, few could find evidence of her "Godlike authority and dominion."

“literary libertinism” that subverts the order of language and of understanding throughout the book (181). Keymer notes the deceptive use of letters to challenge the readers even as Clarissa is tricked.

In the context of Clarissa’s epistolary seduction, which shows in dramatic form Lovelace’s use of letters to deceive and mislead, to mould readers to his purposes, his first narrative letters begin to look very different. They briefly reproduce for the reader the same capacity to beguile that makes their writer so dangerous within the novel’s world. (178)

Clarissa, Keymer notes, assumes a simplistic use of the letter to relay events and thoughts and is slow to recognize the way Lovelace manipulates the truth in letters (179). In the second installment, Richardson offers the dual accounts of events, often presenting the truth of the situation and of Lovelace’s manipulation of Clarissa and the reader after the fact:

Although the most overt dramatisations of his rhetorical wiles are retrospective, placed in such a way as to rebuke readers for their errors rather than forearm them against them, there is reason enough even at the opening of the second instalment to approach Lovelace’s letters with caution. (180)

As many critics have pointed out, Lovelace’s literary power can also seduce the reader and undermine Richardson’s didactic purpose. Although Richardson expresses his desire for a clear message, his epistolary method complicates any single, authoritative message. Without the controlling perspective of a central narrator, though, each reader must draw his or her own conclusions about the truth. When Clarissa fails to write her fallen woman’s narrative, she also relinquishes the controlling power of her perspective. Even though her voice is diffused into various texts and risks being overpowered by Lovelace’s voice in Belford’s edition, Clarissa still successfully influences society’s view of her as a truly virtuous fallen woman.

No Place for the Fallen Woman's Narrative

As the discussion above has suggested, *Clarissa* contains elements of the fallen woman's narrative and an awareness that such narrative structures engage reader interest and influence audience response. But Richardson's epistolary form offers a new relationship between text, reader, and truth, a method supported by Clarissa's final refusal to write her fallen woman's narrative and choose instead an edition of letters. The relationship of Richardson's narrative style and narrative structures like the fallen woman's narrative is part of a broader critical discussion of the originality of Richardson's efforts. While no other critics directly address the fallen woman's narrative in their analysis of Richardson's narrative technique, I see the relationship between the two as important for understanding what Richardson is attempting stylistically and morally with his new method. In rejecting the form of the fallen woman's narrative to tell Clarissa's story, Richardson rejects the coherence of narrative structure, the control of a central narrator, and the clarity of an overt didactic statement. While his epistolary technique brings the novel greater immediacy and more stylistic complexity than the fallen woman's narrative has, it also contributes to the ambivalence and ambiguities experienced by Richardson's first readers, the same ambiguities Richardson tried desperately to correct with each comprehensively revised edition of *Clarissa* and his final compendium of maxims, *Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflexions*. In creating an art form that was more engaging, Richardson unwillingly relinquished some of the narrative control. His new technique was more challenging to readers, but it was also more challenging to him as an author.

In rejecting the coherence of narrative structure found in the fallen woman's narrative and other novels, Richardson was proposing a "new Species of Writing" that he felt would be superior to the "stories" of his time. According to Richardson's own

claims, his new method is more realistic than a “Romance.”³¹ In the process of making something new, as critics like Flynn and Doody have explored, Richardson rejects earlier narrative forms while adapting and transforming them for his own purposes. As Lois Bueler notes, Richardson drew on familiar plot structures of popular drama, which had predictable character types and plots that he could use (19), but he attempted to find new forms as well.

What we see in the novels, above all in *Clarissa*, is Richardson’s struggle to find forms and structures that will both maximize and guide the need for interpretation—that will build the individual ethical case in its richest and most dramatic form so as to involve the reader most fully in the effort of analysis and judgment. (20)

Although offering a new type of writing that he sincerely thought was complete, Richardson frustrates the reader’s desire for more coherence. As Castle points out, “[t]hose elements of significance readers normally search for in fiction (transparent cause-effect relations, the resolution of ambiguities--indeed, all the features of a clearly realized plot) are either lacking, or mysteriously inconclusive” (36). In showing the repeated desire for *Clarissa*’s story throughout the novel, Richardson addresses this urge for coherence and answers it with his own technique.

By rejecting a coherent, sequential narrative structure, Richardson also relinquishes the control of a central narrator. While the most obvious and most frequently discussed aspect of Richardson’s epistolary technique is his absence as the controlling consciousness, this lack of a central narrator greatly affects the action. As Gillis describes, the result presents the reader with multiple styles, voices, and actions that contrast with the expected chronology (5). This multiplicity also influences the way the novel is read. As many critics have highlighted, Richardson’s technique places more

³¹ Castle, like other critics, analyzes the ways in which the epistolary form actually undermines the realism of the text, noting particularly the sometimes unwieldy emphasis on how the letters are written and exchanged.

responsibility for the meaning of the work on the reader. According to most critics, this method was intended to achieve a new effect. Keymer examines the effect of Richardson's narrative technique on the reader, who becomes not a passive entity receiving the analysis of a central narrator but a participant in the moral debates of the text as she listens to the many voices within the text. Richardson aims to "provoke the reader into an active role as examiner, arbiter and judge" (190):

In its structure *Clarissa* does indeed refuse to choose between its principal narrators and antagonists, but this relativism of form is very far from meaning that choices are never made: it means simply that explicit choices are withheld by the text itself, and must be recovered or supplied by the "Carver", "the Reader, to whom in this Sort of Writing, something . . . should be left to make out". (190)

Similar to Keymer's argument that Richardson is engaging readers as "Carvers" of the text, Castle notes that the text forces the reader to contend with the moral messages without the interference of a narrator:

Contrary to Richardson's own expectations, the novel's moral impact lies not in any simple programmatic "message"; the text is, after all, a plethora of contradictory messages. Rather, the moral dimension of *Clarissa* shows up in the way it compels a certain readerly self-examination. By tracing so searchingly the patterns of abuse and exploitation which occur when meanings are routinely and arbitrarily inscribed and reinscribed by interpreters, it invites us to examine the grounds of our own hermeneutic activity. (29)

Castle notes an important effect of Richardson's new technique on all readers. Readers are given less direction and more responsibility.

For some critics, the absence of a central narrator and a controlling, interpreting perspective is Richardson's greatest strength, although with his didactic purpose, it was also the source of Richardson's own frustration.³² As Keymer points out,

³² In Rita Goldberg's analysis of the effect of *Clarissa* on Richardson's European counterparts, she argues that the multiple readings of the novel signal Richardson's failed moral objective: "In the case of Richardson, the work which was supposed to support a rigorous Christian code of conduct turned out instead to contribute materially to its decline. The questions raised in this new form were too profound to be overlooked" (23).

this seems to be Richardson's troubling realisation--that meaning, and most of all moral meaning, is in the end an arbitrary matter. His novel abounds in variant meanings, all of them vulnerable, and in its very form it refuses to choose between them. Instead it implies the equality of each. (189)

Keymer focuses his analysis on Richardson's creation of Lovelace's voice as the most dangerous voice competing with the voices more in line with Richardson's own didactic purpose.

Even without the narrative control provided by the fallen woman's narrative, Richardson succeeds in redefining Clarissa's virtue as the status of spiritual rather than physical chastity. While the absence of her "Story" indicates broader social and narrative limitations at work, it also reinforces the power of individual faith and action to provide spiritual and social redemption. Unlike Moll and Roxana, whose later actions are not consistent with the penitential rhetoric and didactic purpose of the fallen woman's narrative, Clarissa remains unswerving in her virtue. Her death is presented as the penultimate evidence of her spirituality. Even though the desire for a clearly recognizable "Story" is never satisfied, the reader of her letters bears witness to and participates in a more complex moral struggle and triumph than the fallen woman's narrative alone could provide

CHAPTER 5

“STRUGGLING MANFULLY WITH DISTRESS”:
MORAL AGENCY AND FALLEN WOMEN’S
NARRATIVES IN HENRY FIELDING’S *AMELIA*

Henry Fielding’s novel *Amelia*, which ostensibly focuses on the life of “the finest woman in England” and the “best of wives” (545), seems an unlikely source for the consideration of fallen women’s narratives. Unlike Moll, Roxana, and Clarissa, characters famous for their sexual encounters, Amelia stands along with Samuel Richardson’s Pamela as an example of female “virtue rewarded” in eighteenth-century fiction. Yet in this novel about virtue, Fielding includes two fallen women’s narratives, which, when considered in relationship to character and plot, play a significant role in the novel’s structure and theme.¹ In the first tale, Miss Mathews tells William Booth of her

¹*Amelia* is not the first novel where Fielding contrasts a virtuous woman with sexually compromised women of varying circumstances. The first example is Shamela from Fielding’s 1741 parody of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*. In *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Joseph’s love, the virtuous Fanny, is contrasted with Lady Booby; Betty, the chambermaid; and Leonora, the unfortunate Jilt. While Molly Seagram, Mrs. Waters, Nancy Miller, and Bridget Allworthy are all sexually compromised women in *Tom Jones* (1749), Jenny Jones, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Lady Bellaston, and even Susan, the chambermaid, serve as unvirtuous foils for the incomparable Sophia Western. None of these women offers a fallen woman’s narrative in the first person, although conventional elements of the fallen woman’s narrative exist as their stories are related by the narrator or other characters. Mrs. Fitzpatrick narrates the trials of a bad marriage to Sophia, but her subject, purpose, and narrative strategies are not that of a fallen woman. See also Angela Smallwood’s treatment of sexual morality in chapter 3 of *Fielding and the Woman Question*, “Fielding and Some Areas of Inequality Between the Sexes” (35-63) and Mona Scheuermann’s “Henry Fielding’s Images of Women.”

seduction by a soldier, Hebbers. In the second, Mrs. Bennet tells Amelia her tale of being drugged and raped by a man referred to as a “noble lord” or “his lordship.” Like all fallen women’s narratives, these tales are structured in a way that presents Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet as victims of male deception and aggression. As interpolated narratives in Fielding’s broader narrative, each tale plays an important part of Fielding’s theme and narrative strategy.

Unlike the fallen women’s narratives found in *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and *Clarissa*, Miss Mathews’ and Mrs. Bennet’s tales in *Amelia* provide narrative occasions where each woman is in direct contact with her audience. In each narrative, Fielding emphasizes the narrative strategies each woman employs. The motives for and effects of the tale on a particular audience take on great significance, as these two fallen women’s narratives demonstrate most clearly the narrativity that distinguishes the fallen woman’s narrative from other seduction narratives. In fact, the narrative circumstances for each woman’s tale become a significant element of assessing each woman’s morality. Through these tales, Fielding reveals that morality is measured more by the effort to overcome vice than by the sin itself. Although Fielding’s novels repeatedly address definitions of virtue, *Amelia* offers his most self-conscious use of unvirtuous women as a central part of his narrative strategy and theme.

In a novel where accident, deceit, and poor judgment lead to the repeated distress of William and Amelia Booth, the battle between virtue and vice constitutes the central conflict. Although the novel includes issues as broad as legal corruption and as specific as an individual betrayal, much of the plot is driven by numerous ploys for sexual conquest. From Booth’s jail-cell affair with Miss Mathews, to Col. James’ pursuit of Miss Mathews and Amelia, to the noble lord’s stratagems for seducing Amelia, sexual desire generates the novel’s main conflicts and complications, and the preservation of Amelia’s physical virtue becomes one of the novel’s primary plot elements. Even the

often cited issue of corrupt political preferment in eighteenth-century England takes second stage to the theme of sexual pursuit when both Col. James and the noble lord thwart Booth's financial opportunities in order to gain access to Amelia.²

With this emphasis on sexual desire and the deception used to fulfill it, one of the novel's primary themes is the way adultery threatens social stability. Dr. Harrison, in particular, as one voice of the novel's moral perspective, addresses the evils of adultery, the most notable instance being his letter to Col. James, which is first read in jest at the masquerade and later in seriousness by Booth himself. According to Dr. Harrison:

[t]he ruin of both wife and husband, and sometimes of the whole family, are the probable consequence of this fatal injury. Domestic happiness is the end of almost all our pursuits, and the common reward of all our pains. When men find themselves for ever barred from this delightful fruition, they are lost to all industry, and grow careless of all their worldly affairs. Thus they become bad subjects, bad relations, bad friends and bad men. (419)

With marriage as the foundation of society and goal of every individual, adultery is assumed to cause both personal and social decline and to threaten the very future of the human race. What Harrison finds most appalling is that adultery is rarely punished: "What wonder then, if the community in general treat this monstrous crime as a matter of jest, and that men give way to the temptations of a violent appetite, when the indulgence of it is protected by law and countenanced by custom" (381). Through the subject of adultery, Fielding addresses the sexual double standard, which, in its tolerance of men's unrestrained sexual pursuit and unpunished conquest of women, poses a serious social threat. In this context, the fallen women's narratives provide an important subtext for the adultery theme, clearly emphasizing the relationship of chastity to a stable society.

² See Joseph Allen Boone's classification of *Amelia* as a wedlock plot in *Tradition Counter Tradition*. In this novel about married life, Fielding uses the pursuit of female virtue and the restoration of a stable marriage as the basic pattern for his plot.

But adultery and sexual chastity are just one part of Fielding's moral scheme, where virtue requires an active struggle with vice. As Fielding states in the dedication to *Amelia*, his purpose is "to promote the cause of virtue, and to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private" (3). *Amelia*, which many critics refer to as his darkest and weakest novel, at times seems more concerned with vice than with virtue.³ As William and Amelia Booth face many trials in their struggle to survive, Fielding's emphasis is less on Amelia's patient and passive endurance through her indefatigable virtue than it is on Booth's more active, if not always successful, pursuit of virtue and numerous slips into vice. The Booths' lives are fraught with external threats to virtue (a corrupt legal system, the inscrutable preferment process, duels) and private vices (lust, greed, hypocrisy). Although *Amelia* ends happily, with the Booths restored to wealth and secure in their rural retreat, much of the novel portrays both social and individual corruption. As Fielding demonstrates in much of his fiction, no lesson of morality is conveyed only by presenting the ideals to pursue; portraits of the threatening traps to avoid are an important part of his didactic strategy. Through fallen women's narratives, Fielding extends his moral scheme to both men and women, suggesting that feminine virtue also requires active struggle rather than static perfection.

In addition to using fallen women's narratives to develop his moral scheme, Fielding uses Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's tales to enact his view of the role literature plays in shaping individual morality. Although Fielding uses the novel as scathing social critique and overt didacticism, he also demonstrates that fiction, as just

³ In *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, Ian Bell sees *Amelia* as Fielding's "more sombre and disconcerting last novel" where "the inadequacies of the legal system and the miseries it predictably creates, are most fastidiously and relentlessly dissected" (185). Although the novel's inconsistencies and serious tone have drawn much criticism, Bell finds *Amelia* to be Fielding's most interesting novel because it demonstrates "the various connections and misconnections between Fielding the conservative magistrate and pamphleteer and Fielding the imaginative novelist" (217).

one more construction of experience, can model the very process of coping with social ills. Fielding's thematic goal of exposing vice and promoting virtue is replicated within the narrative structure itself, through the novel's repeated pattern of Booth's error, Amelia's distress, the revelation of some cruel deceit, and restoration of equilibrium. Corruption abounds as friends turn into enemies and even immediate family members thwart the couple's security. Through repetition, didacticism, exposed schemes, and interpolated narratives, Fielding's narrative style replicates the labyrinth of injustice and evil that drives the plot. In telling her tale, each fallen woman has the power to seduce or save her audience.

As Ian Bell points out in his book, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*, Fielding's narrative technique enacts the moral tensions he observes. Bell suggests that "[b]y exploiting techniques of juxtaposition and misdirection . . . Fielding's writing betrays deep inner tensions, points of ideological stress and uncertainty" (188). Rather than see this as the novel's structural and stylistic weakness, though, one can see the narrative structure as supporting the novel's theme: events continually serve to expose vice and promote virtue. Although the majority of the plot structure points to a tragic ending, Fielding, true to his comic vision, provides the narrative mechanism needed for a fruitful conclusion. Bell sees *Amelia* providing a didactic model for society rather than a revolutionary challenge:

A deeply flawed world is unsparingly revealed throughout the book, but the aim is to teach readers how best to cope with it, not how to correct it. . . . The consolatory aspect of *Amelia* means that overall it accepts the world more or less as it is, for want of an alternative, offering suggestions for improvement only within what Fielding sees as strictly realistic limits. (219)

In other words, part of the purpose of *Amelia* is to critique human nature and offer Fielding's own moral scheme. Unrealistic as the novel's happy ending seems to many readers, Fielding does not suggest that a material windfall or an appropriate attitude is

sufficient to define a virtuous life. Rather, Fielding constructs a model of life in which the interaction between virtue and vice provides the context for virtuous living. From Fielding's perspective, morality is the primary component of social order, and an accurate and encompassing definition of morality is the key to instructive narrative. As the novel repeatedly focuses on the chaotic, confusing and often threatening world of vice, Fielding's promotion of virtue becomes more of a vigorous battle than an abstract ideal. The novel's plot reinforces Fielding's moral scheme by offering a conclusion that rewards characters who have participated in the active pursuit of virtue.⁴ The moral characters are ones who, like Fielding as author/narrator, have exposed vice and promoted virtue, even if their behavior, like Booth's, is not consistently moral.

Fallen women provide an important example of Fielding's moral scheme enacted in narrative structure. Having undergone their own moral battles and failed, Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet serve as powerful examples of the consequences of lost virtue. Each woman's tale offers an example of virtue tested, but the actual telling of each fallen woman's narrative in *Amelia* is an important element of tested virtue within the broader plot of the novel. Miss Mathews' narrative is used to tempt Booth to adultery, while Mrs. Bennet's saves Amelia from seduction. Like all fallen women's narratives, Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's tales contain familiar elements of characterization and narrativity. And, as stated above, each tale follows the pattern found in the broader plot:

⁴ Note a similar theme developed particularly in *Joseph Andrews*, when Parson Adams argues against George Whitefield's "detestable Doctrine of Faith against good Works." In considering God's response to an individual on Judgment Day, Adams says it is ludicrous to think that God would condemn a person who always acted virtuously just because he or she questioned some articles of faith and would reward a person who never obeyed God's commandments even though he or she believed them. He concludes that "a virtuous and good *Turk*, or Heathen, are more acceptable in the sight of their Creator, than a vicious and wicked Christian, tho' his Faith was as perfectly Orthodox as St. *Paul*'s himself" (72). Parson Adams vigorously defends active, although perhaps not strictly orthodox, virtue.

error, distress, and revelation of deceit. While containing these important elements, the tales themselves serve first as temptation to error and then as a means of revelation to the Booths.

Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet also become important examples of the novel's moral scheme as each character must prove her ability to use her narrative to promote virtue rather than vice. As fallen women, both demonstrate potential weakness. As authors of their own narratives and actors within the broader plot, each woman also has a second opportunity to demonstrate the moral success that comes from rising above corruption and acting virtuously. By providing these female parallels to Booth's own struggle to redeem his slips and errors, Fielding places the responsibility for moral action on the shoulders of each individual, male and female. Fielding critiques men's and women's inability to adhere to his vision of social order, an order based on clearly defined social roles but also on active morality within their position in society.

Fielding uses Mrs. Bennet, in particular, to construct a vision of morality that includes women. By using the fallen woman's narrative within his own narrative strategy, Fielding draws attention to the sexual double standard, while abandoning chastity as the primary issue of women's morality. He suggests instead that women be measured by standards of benevolence and friendship. The use of the fallen woman's narrative also supports Fielding's assertion that a person must make moral judgments based on actions rather than social ideals. Regardless of sex, Fielding's virtuous person should actively pursue moral integrity. At the same time, Fielding reinforces strict definitions of the sexual behavior of women. While affirming gender differences, Fielding constructs a new sense of justice for each gender that surpasses the existing pattern of gendered virtue. As a parallel to the broader moral scheme, the fallen woman's narrative becomes a crucial element of Fielding's didactic intent and narrative strategy in *Amelia*.

Active Virtue and Gendered Morality

Fielding develops his overtly didactic purpose in the first chapter, where he indicates the central theme of his novel: “To retrieve the ill consequences of a foolish conduct, and by struggling *manfully* with distress to subdue it, is one of the noblest efforts of wisdom and virtue” [emphasis mine] (13). Virtue, Fielding suggests, is not an object, a passive character trait; virtue requires agency, active pursuit of what is good and right for society as a whole. In this statement, Fielding broadens his moral scheme beyond an opposition of virtue and vice as static conditions. Amelia’s virtue, for example, is a static ideal, described by Dr. Harrison as a “fortress on a rock; a chastity so strongly defended . . . that the woman must be invincible” (420). The plot, on the other hand, demonstrates that more active resistance is required; simply being virtuous and patiently resisting temptation may not be sufficient to avoid vice. While virtue still serves society’s good and vice causes its ills, Fielding shows the two more actively embroiled in an ongoing battle. Whether evil can be attributed to Satan, individual passions, or the whims of Fortune, the reality is that most human beings regularly and repeatedly encounter evil in the world. Facing these evils requires virtuous behavior rather than virtuous traits; although the two are not mutually exclusive terms, neither are they synonymous. In this paradigm, the fallen woman’s narrative challenges the tendency to define a woman’s morality solely on her initial fall rather than on her subsequent behavior.

In Fielding’s moral scheme, even those who have “fallen” from society’s ideals have the opportunity to live virtuous lives. For this reason, many critics see Booth as the hero of the novel. Because he behaves more foolishly than Amelia does, his struggle with vice is more active than Amelia’s. This dichotomy between the two is also supported by the gendering of virtue common to eighteenth-century discourse, which places man in the active, public role of encountering vice in the world, and the woman in

the passive, private role of protecting virtue at home. Amelia and Booth clearly fit this pattern: Amelia rarely ventures from their home but must still ward off threats, and Booth rarely remains at home but is literally imprisoned when encountering the unceasing corruption of the outside world. In eighteenth-century discourse, females in any public or active role are assumed to be sexually compromised, either as wicked whores or distressed fallen women, an assumption embodied by Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet.

Fielding uses the fallen women's narratives to enact his moral scheme rather than provide simplistic didactic tales concerning the sexual threat to women's virtue. Fallen women are the subject of these interpolated narratives, but as characters and narrators of their own stories, they also enact the struggle between virtue and vice in a way that either supports or complicates their fallen image. Fielding uses fallen women to grapple with the definition of virtue, and he does so through both characterization and structure. By studying Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's narratives and their function in the plot, I can better understand not only what Fielding says about the nature of fallen women, or sexual women and morality, but also how Fielding constructs that idea through narrative strategies. In Fielding's fictional accounts of fallen women, he challenges a simplistic opposition between active and passive virtue, offering instead his own construction of "true" virtue for women and men.

Fielding's moral scheme initially appears to follow traditional notions of masculine and feminine virtue. In Fielding's thematic statement, he aligns action with masculinity and genders his idea of morality, making active virtue masculine and passive virtue feminine, a dichotomy supported by eighteenth-century notions of appropriate gender roles.⁵ In the superficial characterization and actions of Booth and Amelia,

⁵ This opposition of gender traits is supported by eighteenth-century conduct books and clear definitions of the sexual hierarchy. Nancy Armstrong discusses the use

Fielding supports this assumption about gendered virtue. But in the fallen women, Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet, Fielding complicates this initial gender paradigm and demonstrates that the active pursuit of virtue is a necessary component of morality for both males and females. Amelia herself needs to be educated away from the passive response by Mrs. Bennet's narrative, which reveals that vice can cruelly defeat the most virtuous woman. At the same time, Miss Mathews' tale demonstrates the possible corruption that can result when a woman is involved in active moral struggles with temptation.

In spite of Fielding's challenge to gendered morality in *Amelia*, his initial moral scheme reinforces a narrative pattern observed by feminist narrative theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis, who argues that all plots are gendered, with the protagonist/hero as masculine; the antagonist/obstacle as feminine. Agency, the ability to act or exert power, to develop and change, is seen as masculine. The object, on the other hand, is seen as feminine: to be desired or rejected, to succumb to or react against male power, to be static and changeless. De Lauretis works from the opposition inherent in any narrative between the masculine and the feminine:

Opposite pairs such as inside/outside, the raw/the cooked, or life/death appear to be merely derivatives of the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage; and if passage may be in either direction, from insider to outside or vice versa, from life to death or vice versa, nonetheless all these terms are predicated on the *single* figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing, the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (119)

of conduct books in educating young women to this domestic ideal. Concerning the issue of sexual morality, which is an important element in the consideration of gendered virtue, Smallwood asserts that "[i]n Fielding's world, society's expectations concerning an individual's standards of sexual morality were governed by consideration of the person's sex and, in the case of a woman, also by consideration of her social class" (43). See also Elizabeth Bergen Brophy and Margaret Ann Doody.

De Lauretis asserts that sexual difference is inscribed in all narratives and “hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning, fiction, and history, represented by the literary-artistic tradition and all the texts of culture” (121).⁶

De Lauretis’ theory of the gendered plot is particularly useful in examining the distinction between Fielding’s definition of virtue for his moral scheme and the functioning of gender in the plot structure. Fielding’s reference to “manfully struggling” with vice initially asserts what de Lauretis would call an age-old gendering of the basic plot structure. As de Lauretis explains, this basic distinction between masculine action and feminine inaction inscribes gender roles into each biological character within the plot. But beyond this obvious plotting of gender and virtue, such a simplistic dichotomy breaks down, particularly through Fielding’s construction of the fallen woman’s narrative. Fielding, I would argue, does present a similarly “gendered” plot, with Booth having the moral agency to “manfully” pursue virtue and Amelia, on the other hand, embodying passive feminine virtue. On the surface, the two fallen women’s narratives can also be examined for the structuring of these two principles, with each woman the passive victim of male seduction. As mentioned above, though, the fallen women’s narratives become the site for Fielding’s own definition of virtue which surpasses gender.

⁶ De Lauretis’ distinction between the masculine and feminine elements in every narrative is derived from Jurij Lotman’s examination of how characters move in what he refers to as plot-space. According to de Lauretis, Lotman divides characters into mobile and immobile, the mobile being those able to move and change and the immobile being those who function as the plot space. In narrative, Lotman identifies this basic pattern of the mobile character encountering a boundary or obstacle of some sort, which is personified in the immobile characters. From this conflict, de Lauretis says, Lotman defines two basic functions of any narrative, encounter of or entry into a “closed space” and dominance of or emergence from that space. As de Lauretis interprets this, “[i]n this mythical-textual mechanics, then, the hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female and indeed, simply, the womb” (119). What de Lauretis refers to as “sexual difference” in *Alice Doesn’t*, she later describes as gender in *The Technologies of Gender* (1987).

While many critics assert that Booth conveys Fielding's moral theme, I suggest that Mrs. Bennet also embodies and enacts the theme that humans need to rise above difficult circumstances and choose to live morally. The connection between gender and virtue is broken down by Mrs. Bennet as she moves outside the passive role and the domestic realm to struggle "manfully" with vice. As a fallen character, she is given the opportunity to openly admit her mistakes and redeem herself. The telling of her fallen woman's narrative in order to save Amelia from a similar fate is an important element in the novel's comic conclusion. In spite of (or because of) Mrs. Bennet's timely confession, she is rewarded with domestic happiness at the novel's conclusion, an important variation of the consequences of many fallen women's narratives. Fielding's construction of a fallen woman who is not permanently labeled or punished for her sexual lapse conveys his critique of existing definitions of feminine virtue and his own construction of what constitutes virtue. Without her chastity, a fallen woman may have lost one definition of virtue, but she can still live virtuously.

The relationship between gender and virtue is considered in *Fielding and the Woman Question*, where Angela Smallwood goes so far as to assert that Fielding's novels "are directed towards raising in their first readers a sharp awareness of the gendering of moral conduct as a pressing social evil" (3). Smallwood suggests that Fielding's primary attack on this opposition stems from his vision of morality that is both active and private, a conception of virtue that requires effort on an individual level and is applicable to both men and women. As she points out, Fielding assumes the idea of a "unified set of moral ideals for both sexes" (46), which she sees as a direct contradiction to the currency of the sexual double standard which dominated the society of which Fielding wrote. Smallwood argues that in eighteenth-century England "[m]en and women are treated as distinct in their social roles, in their personal qualities, and in their moral potential in the broadest sense" (85). While beginning with this gendered dichotomy, Fielding's moral

scheme challenges the association of gender and virtue.⁷ Smallwood suggests that his view of morality is much broader than gendered morality allowed in eighteenth-century England:

Fielding's remaking of a truly humane morality cannot be achieved without his unifying at the moral level the worlds of the two sexes which are so extensively differentiated by his society. On a much broader base than the single issue of sexual conduct, Fielding advances his humane ideal by broadening the range of moral and personal qualities commonly associated exclusively with the female sex, and by demonstrating the importance and viability of these qualities as the focus of the aspiration for all good men as well. (88)

Much of Fielding's fiction concerns just, sincere, and benevolent behavior on the part of every valued character.⁸ To create this new moral ideal that is not gendered, Fielding must strengthen the "image of female goodness" and refine or revise "male morals" (Smallwood 126).

While Smallwood describes what I observe as Fielding's critique of existing construction of women's virtue, she fails to acknowledge the extent to which Fielding would have affirmed what she refers to as "the worlds of the two sexes which are so extensively differentiated by his society" (88). While Fielding presumes to offer a moral scheme equally applicable to all humans, he still constructs feminine virtue within the

⁷ Fielding's attempt to challenge definitions of virtue and gender is most humorously and extensively established in *Joseph Andrews*, where the young servant Joseph becomes the object of his mistress Lady Booby's desire. While Joseph later moves beyond the passive role normally assigned to women, he is characterized by typically feminine morality in the opening reversal of sex roles, a situation which offers an entertaining challenge to assumptions of gendered morality.

⁸ Smallwood suggests that Fielding achieves this critique by discrediting characters who judge according to masculine ideals and distinguish between male and female standards; by advocating "the virtues of private rather than of public heroines," which in the eighteenth century was considered a more feminine value; by guiding the "reader's reassessment of effeminacy" as central to his moral purpose and also his comic effect; and by endowing his female characters with his "unified humane ideal" (88). Armstrong would see this as Fielding simply moving morality into the domestic sphere, which supports the middle-class battle with aristocratic values.

domestic sphere. Fielding offers his own construction of feminine virtue, but he clearly establishes a feminine virtue that supports rather than challenges appropriate gender roles for eighteenth-century England. Miss Mathews' use of the fallen woman's narrative as a tool of seduction results in her limited role as a mistress and shrew. Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, is given moral agency that is rewarded with a new opportunity for domestic happiness with a second husband and two sons. By offering a moral scheme that surpasses gender, Fielding complicates any simplistic assumptions about female images and agency even as he utilizes many stereotypical images and functions of the feminine within the novel. In *Amelia*, the controlling narrative voice presents static images of women as angels or monsters, and fallen women as either penitents or prostitutes. I will demonstrate that Fielding uses these "mythic masks" and narrative roles which support traditional gender roles for women as a means of challenging readers' assumptions about judging women as only passively virtuous or actively wicked.

As I will show, Miss Mathews' image as the villainous whore is supported by her function in the plot as a moral obstacle for Booth. On the other hand, Mrs. Bennet's image as a penitent victim is only part of her more complex characterization and her function in the plot as an active moral agent. Within the broader narrative, Fielding constructs the fallen women's narratives in a way that compares the two women but contrasts each woman's effect on the moral progress of the hero and heroine. By offering the stereotypical fallen woman in one character and then complicating that role in another, Fielding's narratives challenge simplistic assumptions about the relationship between sin and morality in general, and between women's sexuality and their moral nature in particular. I argue that Fielding draws on the fallen woman's narrative in order to parallel and reinforce his own thematic purpose.

Although the histories of Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet differ in many respects, Fielding utilizes strategies found in other fallen woman's narratives in constructing their

tales. Each woman offers her story as a warning of the snares facing vulnerable women. While Fielding clearly works within this long tradition of the seduction tales in their various forms, from scandalous to didactic, it is interesting to note what strategies he adapts.

The Importance of Audience in the Fallen Woman's Narrative

One unique aspect of Fielding's handling of the fallen woman's narrative is the context of an intimate setting for the oral narrative, a feature that does not rely on the mediation of the written word as the stories of Moll, Roxana, and Clarissa do. The result is a more direct relationship between narrator and audience, more sense on the narrator's part of adapting the story to suit an immediate narrative situation with more interchange and response, and more direct consequences in shaping the future relationship of audience and speaker. For example, Fielding provides a private context for the apparently illicit tales as both Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet lock the door before beginning their stories, establishing that a fallen woman can only share the truth of her sexual experience in private, that stories of fallen women function as secret confessions. In each case, this act signals the beginning of the narrative moment for each fallen woman, a specific break from the frame narrative that prepares the reader as well as Booth and Amelia for the sensitive subject matter to follow.⁹

The relationship between narrator and audience in each context underscores each woman's motive for telling her story. Miss Mathews' tale demonstrates the importance

⁹ See Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, where he attempts to write a history of sexuality that considers its active deployment rather than its repression. Using the Catholic confession as the model for the prolific confessions about sex found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse, Foucault argues that ideology prescribed how sex could be discussed and impelled people to speak in those terms, a structure that necessarily silenced any deviation from the norm. His discourse on sex seems particularly relevant to the confessional aspect of some fallen women's tales.

of the tale as justification for behavior. Since Booth and Miss Mathews knew each other as young adults, Miss Mathews has to explain her appearance in jail while preserving Booth's previous regard for her. She also uses the tale to seduce Booth, a man to whom she claims to have always been attracted. With self-justification and seduction as her objectives, Miss Mathews' tale is interspersed with sighs and tears and Booth's attempts to comfort her:

“O Mr. Booth! What was then my situation. I tremble even now from the reflection.—I must stop a moment. I can go no farther.” Booth attempted all in his power to sooth [sic] her; and she soon recovered her powers, and proceeded in her story. (45)

When Miss Mathews expresses her grief too often and too vehemently, Booth becomes less sympathetic. For example, following one of her declarations about the trials of women, the narrator points out that “Booth, though enough affected at some parts of the story, had great difficulty to refrain from laughter” (43).

Mrs. Bennet's tale is also a story of justification but more significantly one of instruction, serving to warn Amelia of the noble lord's advances. The need to explain her circumstances influences Mrs. Bennet's starting point. After claiming to relate only “that part which leads to catastrophe,” she starts many years earlier when she was a teenager (268). The narrator explains Mrs. Bennet's motives:

And here possibly the reader will blame Mrs. Bennet for taking her story so far back, and relating so much of her life in which Amelia had no concern; but in truth, she was desirous of inculcating a good opinion of herself, from recounting those transactions where her conduct was unexceptionable, before she came to the more dangerous and suspicious part of her character. (268)

Throughout the narrative, into which Amelia interjects some impatience at its length, Mrs. Bennet has many emotional outbursts that require Amelia's reassurance and a sip of brandy. Although the interaction between narrator and audience is again somewhat humorous, Claude J. Rawson emphasizes that Mrs. Bennet's story is not treated ironically: “At the same time, Mrs. Bennet is legitimately overwrought; Amelia knows

that important things directly affecting herself are about to be revealed; and there is no doubt that Mrs. Bennet's story, when it comes, is meant to be taken as genuinely distressing and has a poignant bearing on Amelia's troubles" (155). The direct and immediate effect of her tale is averting Amelia's seduction by the noble lord.

While Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's motives are a significant factor in their relationship to their audience, the motive is also important to the role the narrative plays in the novel's broader plot. Miss Mathews' tale leads to her affair with Booth and her later anger at his rejection, a central factor in her encouraging Col. James' plot against Booth and her own threat to expose the affair to Amelia. Mrs. Bennet's tale serves as a turning point in the novel, where the realization of the noble lord's scheme alters Amelia's future behavior and prevents her seduction. Clearly these narratives become more than simple didactic tales that serve as exempla for or parallels to the frame narrative, although as interpolated narratives they accomplish both of these functions. Fielding's focus on the narrativity of the fallen woman's narrative emphasizes the importance of the process of narration as well as the content. In spite of Fielding's unique emphasis on the fallen woman's narrative as an oral narrative and an integral part of the plot, Fielding still retains important structural, thematic, and stylistic elements of the fallen woman's narrative in both women's tales.

The Critique of the Libertine in *Amelia*

As Bell details in his discussion of "the harlot's progress," the discourse concerning fallen women shares several important traits, particularly the attack on the double standard and the subsequent portrayal of the women as victims. Fielding's narratives build on these basic assumptions, as the attack on the double standard provides the basis for each woman's plot, with the libertine rake as the agent and the innocent woman as his object. Seduction and betrayal provide the basic plot structure for each

narrative. Even in Miss Mathews' tale, Hebbers' deceit is the underlying reality and cause of the plot's negative conclusion. For Miss Mathews, Hebbers pursues her with promises of marriage; for Mrs. Bennet, the noble lord offers greatly needed financial assistance. In both women's tales, the man takes the initiative in pursuing a sexual relationship with them and, by either trick or force, succeeds in consummating his desire. Following the "fall," the sexually compromised Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet can only fit into categories that do not include either devoted wife, dependent daughter, or respectable independent woman. In Miss Mathews' case, she does agree to be Hebbers' mistress and is still abandoned. For Mrs. Bennet, the venereal disease she contracts and passes on to her husband represents an inescapable stigma, which contributes to her husband's death. Hebbers and the noble lord, on the other hand, take little responsibility and offer no recompense for their sexual infractions, although the noble lord does provide Mrs. Bennet with an allowance after she appeals to Mrs. Ellison for assistance. Abandoning a woman is presented as a typical and convenient reaction for the men.

In this basic plot structure, the male is characterized as a libertine rake, a man following no religious or moral law, particularly concerning sexual relationships with women. The indictment of such behavior is repeated throughout the novel through characterization, direct didactic statements, and events. Both the frame narrative and the interpolated narratives contain many libertine rakes. Hebbers, Miss Mathews' lover, although the first example of the libertine rake in the novel and a familiar stereotype of the soldier as seducer, is only a minor target for Fielding's attack on this immoral behavior.¹⁰ In a character strikingly similar to Samuel Richardson's Lovelace, the more

¹⁰ In his analysis of eighteenth-century criminal biographies, Philip Rawlings describes what he sees as Fielding's participation in, and even exploitation of, a crime panic in 1748. People feared that the demobilization of the Army and Navy following the end of the Austrian War would result in an increase in crimes committed by unoccupied

significant example is the noble lord, whose behavior is identical in both Mrs. Bennet's account and in the frame narrative. The noble lord, renowned for his creative pursuit and subsequent abandonment of attractive women, had not only raped Mrs. Bennet but also seduced Mrs. Trent, with Capt. Trent himself serving as a pimp in that assignation and others. The noble lord's attraction to Amelia and the machinations involved in destroying Booth and positioning Amelia for destruction are familiar and the outcome appears predictable. Col. James' affair with Miss Mathews and his persistent attempts to gain Amelia's affection are also offered as an example of the skewed morality and corrupt efforts of these libertines. Booth himself comments that Col. James' "known character" was that of a "perfect libertine with regard to women" (169), and that "a man, who should make use of stratagems and contrivances to seduce [a woman's] virtue, . . . is human nature depraved, stript of all its worth, and loveliness and dignity, and degraded down to a level with the vilest brutes" (446).

Within the fallen woman's narratives, the libertine is clearly at fault. In Miss Mathews' tale, although she admits that her own jealousy and vanity made her susceptible to Hebbers' advances, he clearly deceives her in order to seduce and then abandon her. When Hebbers refuses to marry Miss Mathews after their several month affair, she describes his cruel sneer when she threatens to reveal him as a villain. Understanding that a man's reputation is not as vulnerable as a woman's, Hebbers reminds her that her own honor would be more injured by such a claim. Mrs. Bennet uses a similar pattern of blaming her own vanity for her vulnerability but clearly indicting her seducer as the source of her fall: "But if I was silly in being deceived, how wicked was the wretch who deceived me; who used such art, and employed such pains, such incredible pains to deceive me!" (294). Her vulnerability, she argues, resulted from the

soldiers and sailors. Hebbers is only one of many soldier characters in *Amelia* who are involved in sexual crimes (Col. James, Capt. Trent, and Booth himself) (24).

very trait that a chaste woman should possess: “Innocence, it is true, possessed my heart; but it was innocence unguarded, intoxicated with foolish desires, and liable to every temptation” (299). Even in a tale where Miss Mathews’ motives are questionable, Fielding emphasizes the perils of passive, unprotected virtue.

Throughout the novel, characters also repeatedly indict senseless seduction, enjoyed more for the initial conquest than for any subsequent relationship. As Mrs. Bennet asks: “Good Heavens! what are these men! what is this appetite, which must have novelty and resistance for its provocatives; and which is delighted with us no longer than while we may be considered in the light of enemies” (308). In this paradigm, the battle of the sexes holds more interest for men because of the thrill of the pursuit and victory, a construction of male sexual desire that serves as the basis of the seduction plot. Mrs. Bennet’s description of the seduction pattern emphasizes the plot in which the masculine protagonist pursues his goal: the conquest of female chastity.

Two key voices of the novel’s moral stance, Dr. Harrison and the narrator, also attack the immorality of seducers. Upon learning of Col. James’ advances toward Amelia, Dr. Harrison is “shocked at seeing [villainy] so artfully disguised under the appearance of so much virtue” (381). The narrator himself places the blame for sexual violation on the seducer rather than the seduced:

[W]e often admire at the folly of the dupe, when we should transfer our whole surprize to the astonishing guilt of the betrayer. In a word, many an innocent person hath owed his ruin to this circumstance alone, that the degree of villainy was such as must have exceeded the faith of every man who was not himself a villain. (351-352)

The “astonishing guilt” of the libertine rake is clear, regardless of the circumstances, and, as is the case in other fallen women’s narratives, the context and tale itself offer a full indictment of the libertine rake.

Perhaps the most vivid account of the seducer's threat to female chastity appears in the rather humorous scene of Sergeant Atkinson's dream about Col. James' threat to Amelia. Atkinson has the "most horrid dream, in which he imagined that he saw the colonel standing by the bed-side of Amelia, with a naked sword in his hand, and threatening to stab her instantly, unless she complied with his desires" (384). Although this graphic description of swords, stabbing, and desire, described with obvious sexual imagery, emphasizes the danger of such sexual encounters, Fielding places this scene in a humorous context of error, confusion, and comedy by having Atkinson, in his tormented sleep, practically strangle Mrs. Bennet, who then faints. After mistakenly throwing cherry brandy on her to revive her, Atkinson is discovered by Booth in the midst of a chaotic scene which is described in a way that replicates the physical threat of some sexual encounters: "The bed appeared to be all over blood, and his [Atkinson's] wife weltring in the midst of it. Upon this, the sergeant almost in a frenzy, cried out, 'O Heavens! I have killed my wife. I have stabbed her. I have stabbed her'" (384-385). While the seriousness of the scene abates when Mrs. Bennet is resuscitated, the blood turns out to be brandy, and Atkinson relates his dream, the implications of the confusion for the constant threat on female chastity is clear. Amelia, afraid of Col. James' advances already, sees the connection too clearly to dismiss the event and the dream as a humorous mistake. She tells Booth: "But my spirits are so discomposed with the dreadful scene I saw last night, that a dream, which at another time, I should have laughed at, hath shocked me" (388). Through this dream and its consequences, Fielding is able to convey vividly the pattern of serious sexual threats that he constructs through the plot as a whole and through the subplots of Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's histories.

The Comparison of Two Fallen Women's Narratives

Fielding makes it clear that Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet construct their tales within the seduction genre, despite the drastically contrasting circumstances and motives for telling their stories. To do this, Fielding draws direct parallels between the two narratives, intentionally pairing them in order to emphasize their contrasting motives and effects. To begin with, each woman places her story within the genre of the romance tale or scandalous memoir, a form which influences the arrangement of plot and selection of details. For example, Miss Mathews, when explaining that she will not provide too many details, says "it is, . . . much the same in all cases; and there is, perhaps, scarce a single phrase that hath not been repeated ten millions of times" (43). Miss Mathews' reference to "all cases" indicates that she is patterning her tale after familiar stories. She also omits the details of her sexual encounter, indicating to Booth that he may "guess the rest" (44).

The narrator also alludes to the romance genre when consciously omitting details concerning Miss Mathews and Booth's affair in jail:

. . . we will lock up likewise a scene which we do not think proper to expose to the eyes of the public. If any over curious readers should be disappointed on this occasion, we will recommend such readers to the apologies with which certain gay ladies have lately been pleased to oblige the world, where they will possibly find every thing recorded, that past [sic] at this interval. (148)

The adjective "gay" is used here to mean immoral or dissolute. As David Blewett points out in his notes to the text, Fielding was very likely referring to the "Apology" of the famous courtesan Con Phillips or other scandalous women's "Memoirs" which had appeared in previous years. Fielding is obviously constructing his fallen women's narratives in the context of this genre.

Allusions to familiar narrative details of the romance genre are also present in Mrs. Bennet's tale. Uncertain where to begin, Mrs. Bennet tells Amelia that, while she "would avoid anything trivial," she realizes that details are important to "stories of

distress, especially where love is concerned” (268). When she recounts the actual incident of her rape, she tells Amelia that she “must draw a curtain over the residue of that fatal night” (300). Once again, the lack of detail cues the reader to the genre and anticipated structure and content of the narrative.¹¹

A second corresponding feature of Fielding’s two fallen women’s narratives is a clearly expressed didactic purpose for each tale. At the climactic moment in her story, Miss Mathews declares:

O may my fate be a warning to every woman to keep her innocence, to resist every temptation, . . . let her remember she walks on a precipice, and the bottomless pit is to receive her, if she slips; nay, if she makes but one false step. (44)

Miss Mathews’ warning is typical of fallen women’s narratives, a conventional feature which she uses unconsciously and inappropriately since no woman is present. In creating a fallen woman’s tale, she adopts a tone and imagery which suit the paradigm of her tale but not her immediate audience. Aware of her mistake, she even apologizes to Booth, admitting, “I might have spared these exhortations, since no woman hears me” (44). She attributes her misuse of the exhortation to her emotions and asks Booth not to be surprised that she is so “affected on this occasion” (44).

Like Miss Mathews, Mrs. Bennet provides her most direct caution to other women just before describing her rape, when she concludes that “the woman who gives up the least out-work of her virtue, doth, in that very moment, betray the citadel” (299). In contrast to Miss Mathews’ admonition, though, Mrs. Bennet’s warning suits her audience and has an immediate effect. Amelia cries, “O! Mrs. Bennet, . . . I look upon you, . . . as my preserver from the brink of a precipice; from which I was falling into the

¹¹ See also Foucault on the relationship between apparent repression of sexuality and the impetus and apparatus for discourse about sexuality. The eliciting of a need to know while withholding information seems particularly applicable in Fielding’s technique in both fallen women’s narratives.

same ruin” (300). Amelia’s echo of the precipice image found elsewhere in the novel and in many fallen women’s narratives emphasizes the apparent use of these “histories” as a caution against the snares laid for female virtue, a problem evidenced by the repeated threats to Amelia’s virtue throughout the novel. Miss Mathews’ use of this rhetorical structure is undermined by both the context and content of her tale. For Mrs. Bennet, though, the cautionary history serves as a general exhortation to all virtuous young women and, most importantly, to Amelia, supporting both the context and content of her story.

By employing similar narrative strategies in the hands of both Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet, Fielding establishes a comparison between the two women as fallen women, even though their individual stories and circumstances are very different. Fielding works within the genre of the seduction plot, but then draws on the assumptions that accompany the concept of female sexual fallenness to demonstrate his moral vision for all fallen humanity. All fallen women, Fielding shows, are not alike. Error at the hands of vice does not preclude the possibility of virtue. And didactic rhetoric alone does not contribute to morality.

Fielding and the Images of Women

Fielding utilizes this same technique of employing and then complicating a familiar paradigm in constructing the images of women. Fielding begins with familiar female stereotypes by presenting Amelia as a static female ideal and Miss Mathews as a static female threat. But by subsequently opposing Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet as fallen women, the prostitute as opposed to the penitent, Fielding portrays Mrs. Bennet in a manner that surpasses any simplistic classification in order to construct the important traits of a truly moral person.

Fielding's particular concern with women's images is apparent in a quotation from Horace on the title page: "A man can possess nothing better than a virtuous woman, nor any thing worse than a bad one." The first part of this quotation is clearly directed at the heroine Amelia, but the second part points to another subject, the bad woman. Although the novel is full of encomiums on Amelia's ideal appearance and behavior, Fielding also characterizes her through foils, such as Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet, who are the "bad ones," because they are fallen women.¹² Fielding begins with this basic dichotomy in order to demonstrate the limits of such static conceptions of vice and virtue. In developing his notion of the truly moral individual, Fielding defies simplistic opposition of "types."¹³ Even though Fielding's moral scheme ultimately challenges the static images of women suggested in the epigraph, he begins by employing such superficial assumptions about women's morality in the early chapters of the book where Amelia is presented as the angel and Miss Mathews as the monster.

Fielding's early use of obvious moral "types" is part of his strategy to reveal and then challenge the reader's and Booth's assumptions about morality. In Booth's early jail experience, he encounters many characters and incidents which are the opposite of what

¹² See Mona Scheuermann's lengthy description of Fielding's two categories of women: the ideal generous, domestic woman (Amelia and Sophia) and the threatening destructive woman (all other female characters). "[W]omen who do not fit the nurturing role for the male are looked on with enormously less approval by Fielding. And into this last group, unfortunately, very often seems to fall the generality of women against which paragons like Sophia and Amelia are to be measured" (232).

¹³ Smallwood notes an earlier source that would support my assertion that Fielding plays off these two women types—virtuous and corrupt—in order to offer a third option. Smallwood cites an essay in *The Champion* (Thursday 24 January 1739-40), where Fielding writes about three female characters: "the wanton, worldly and destructive mistress who represents vice; the austere prude, emblem of institutionalised morality; and Fielding's own ideal of virtue, a female figure who is neither loose nor conventional" (127). While Miss Mathews is clearly modeled on the first character, Amelia is a version of the second. Mrs. Bennet fits well into the third model Fielding offers and demonstrates the mixed nature of morality.

is expected. In the opening trial scenes, Justice Thrasher, who the narrator says “had some few imperfections in his magistratical capacity” (16), consistently misjudges each case brought before him. In the first case he bases his guilty verdict on the fact that the man was an Irishman. The next two cases deal with sexual violations: the first, a poor woman accused of prostitution when she was only fetching a midwife for her mistress, and the second, a genteel couple caught in a compromising, apparently sexual, situation. When Judge Thrasher condemns the first and acquits the second, the narrator observes that he “had too great an honour for truth to suspect that she ever appeared in sordid apparel; nor did he ever sully his sublime notions of that virtue, by uniting them with the mean ideas of poverty and distress” (19). Tapping into the familiar link between financial distress and fallen women, Fielding challenges the reader’s assumptions about women, sexuality, and virtue.

Building on this example of the importance of distinguishing between appearance and reality, Fielding exposes Booth’s own assumptions. Once Booth is unfairly committed for assault, he encounters similarly disturbing contradictions. The narrator’s description of Blear-Eyed Moll, an obese, syphilis-contaminated woman, is “productive of moral lesson” because, as the narrator concludes, “however wretched her fortune may appear to the reader, she was one of the merriest persons in the whole prison” (21). This lesson about judging from appearances is repeated as Booth encounters a “very pretty girl” with “great innocence in her countenance,” who turns out to be a prostitute who vehemently curses him (24). A very ragged young woman, on the other hand, had been arrested for simply eating bread her father stole for her. As Bell points out, Fielding demonstrates repeatedly that moral character is not clearly established through appearance or rank:

So often throughout this tale, hidden motives are uncovered, or secrets are disclosed, leading us to suspect that the outward carriage and public status of

individuals is at best a clumsy guide to their true character, and that behind the smiling mask there may lie a disfigured visage. (222)

In considering these opening incidents to Fielding's portrayal of women, Smallwood argues that the opening prison scenes contain aspects of a "social hell, in which female beauty has suddenly become disassociated from moral perfection" (164), a discovery that destabilizes Booth's and the reader's assumptions about feminine virtue. According to Bell, these encounters instill "the expectation that, in a society of deceptive façades, female beauty is most likely to prove merely a mask for treachery" (165). While Smallwood argues that Fielding utilizes images of treacherous women in characterizing Miss Mathews in order to establish a context in which Amelia's virtue is given additional weight (166), I argue that he is also providing the reader with the most common view of sexually unchaste women as a basis for his later unique portrayal of Mrs. Bennet. By raising the reader's suspicions about the relationship between a woman's appearance and her true morality, Fielding provides an important context for the reader's first introduction to Amelia and her apparent foil, Miss Mathews, as the angel and the whore. This simplistic opposition is then challenged by the later and more complex portrait of Mrs. Bennet. Although both Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet serve as foils for Amelia, their portrayals and narratives serve as a useful contrast to each other as well.

Amelia: The Portrait of Virtue

Although Amelia is the heroine of the novel, we initially meet her only through Booth's elaborate history of their courtship, marriage, and troubles. In his narrative to Miss Mathews, Booth describes Amelia as the eternally patient, submissive, and virtuous woman, and most of her subsequent behavior supports this characterization. Throughout the novel, Amelia clearly embodies a moral standard and an ideal to which her irresponsible husband aspires. As many critics note, Fielding's idealized portrait denies

Amelia any complexity and any touch of humanity (or, some argue, any interest).

Clearly, though, she is presented repeatedly as the unchanging, uncompromising virtuous woman complete with all the conduct book traits.

In this position as static saint, Amelia immediately serves as the polar opposite to Miss Mathews. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in "Female Changelessness; or, What do Women Want?," refers to Fielding's Amelia as the "woman-as-saint" and Miss Mathews as "woman-as-sinner" (273). Although representing opposite sides of the spectrum, "both characters, equally the products of male fantasy, are defined by unchanging structures of feeling" (273), and are evidence of Fielding's "conviction that the female world divides into bad women and good women" (276). Amelia, Spacks points out, "exemplifies noble womanhood: non-aggressive, sacrificial, subordinating herself to another whom she also helps and inspires" (280), a construction which denies "the possibility of rich and complicated moral development in women" (280). While Amelia does remain a static character, representing the ideal standard society uses to judge women's virtue, she does not necessarily represent Fielding's only conception of female virtue.¹⁴ Such simplistic opposition between a good woman and bad is an opposition that Fielding challenges through the fallen women's narratives. The triangle created between Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet in opposition to each other as different types of fallen women and in opposition to Amelia as an ideal offers a new image of the virtuous woman. As the reader has already discovered and Booth is yet to learn, the appearance of virtue does not

¹⁴ Scheuermann devotes a significant portion of her essay to developing what she defines as Amelia's ideal traits: nonintellectual woman, devoted wife, loving mother. But she does not include the possibility for Fielding's affirmation of any other woman than the perfect Amelia. She simply classifies Mrs. Bennet as a shrewish bluestocking and Miss Mathews as the villainous whore. "There are angels and monsters enough in Fielding's characterizations of women; it is the merely mortal woman who is a rarity in his gallery of images" (276). Scheuermann overlooks Fielding's support of Mrs. Bennet as a "merely moral woman" (276).

always indicate true morality. Negotiating the pitfalls posed by the simplistic acceptance of such dualities is one of the skills that Booth must acquire in his moral development.¹⁵

Miss Mathews: A Portrait of Vice

In contrast to Booth's description of Amelia as a truly virtuous woman, the narrator characterizes Miss Mathews as a stereotypically bad woman: the temptress whose beauty and innocence attracts men, a whore who lasciviously continues in her sin, a monster with destructive power that threatens society. Although Miss Mathews presents herself as a victimized woman, complete with her fallen woman's narrative to convince Booth of that fact, her actual behavior and the narrator's hints of her real identity as a temptress and fury undermine her self-portrait. For example, when Booth enters Miss Mathews' quarters in jail and she bursts into tears, the narrator first raises doubts about her motives by suggesting that her tears could be of "sorrow or shame; or, if the reader pleases, of rage" (34). After she regains her composure and observes Booth's sympathy, she speaks with "bewitching softness, of which she was a perfect mistress" (34). Temptresses bewitch, and the narrator establishes Miss Mathews' skillful seductive power, which she uses as she narrates her own story and plays audience to Booth's history.

The narrator's emphasis on Miss Mathews as seductress and Booth as victim is repeated throughout their narrative exchange. As Patricia Howell Michaelson observes: "The story-telling is interactive, part of the seduction. Miss Mathews' interruptions become increasingly pointed; her sighs when Booth is finished leave little doubt of her

¹⁵ Although Amelia remains a construct of female virtue in Booth's early account, her later role is also interpreted by some as more active than Spacks' formulation allows. See Smallwood's defense of Amelia's "moral independence" (126), active virtue (167), and her importance in acting out the novel's definition of virtue (145). See also Bell on Amelia's transformation into an ambiguous moral status.

intentions” (257). Her objective is achieved when, at the conclusion of their exchange of histories, they also exchange affection “in a manner inconsistent with the strict rules of virtue and chastity” (148). While the narrator blames Booth for his weakness, he states that Miss Mathews used “every art to soften, to allure, to win, and to enflame” (148). Fielding does not invalidate the assumption that a sexual woman is an incorrigible whore; instead, he draws on such a stereotype of a fallen woman and establishes Miss Mathews as the type of fallen woman that Mrs. Bennet is not.

Fielding’s portrayal of Miss Mathews uses one conventional assumption regarding fallen women: having been sexually compromised, they are forever sexually immoral. In examining Fielding’s portrayal of Miss Mathews, Bell concludes that Fielding makes Miss Mathews the temptress, shifting the real blame from Booth, making his plight more sympathetic to the reader:

By Fielding’s authorial advocacy, the combat between the alluring predatory Miss Mathews and the helpless Captain is made to seem very unequal, . . . with the odds stacked against Booth to such an extent that he cannot really be held responsible for his unavoidable inconstancy. (223)

Bell points to the assumption that “licentious women were to blame for male sexual behaviour,” a common feature Bell notes in discussing eighteenth-century discourse on what he refers to as the extra-legal woman (224). Building on the stereotype of the temptress, this initial construction of the fallen woman assumes she consciously chooses to sin, even though she is the victim in the seduction that led to her fall. She is classified as prurient mistress. In this particular encounter, the fallen woman becomes the obstacle to Booth’s fidelity and morality, and she even uses a supposedly moral history, the didactic tale of the victimized fallen woman, for the immoral purposes of seducing him. I find this element of Miss Mathews’ narrative most interesting. Presenting a fallen woman as temptress is not a unique strategy, but Fielding offers a new twist by having a temptress disguise her seduction in a fallen woman’s narrative. The critique is not only

of women's sexual corruption but also Booth's naïve acceptance of what Miss Mathews appears to be. In this context, though, the fallen woman's narrative becomes a tool of seduction, not of reparation.

Booth's blindness to Miss Mathews' wickedness is revealed not only through her dramatic storytelling but also in her direct conversation with Booth. In addition to Miss Mathews' image as temptress, her destructive power is confirmed through the image of monster in disguise. When Booth asks her about her murder charge, she admits to murdering Hebbers with a pen knife and to the pleasure she received from her revenge:

"Murder! oh! 'tis music in my ears. - You have heard then the cause of my commitment, my glory, my delight, my reparation! - Yes, my old friend, this is the hand, this is the arm that drove the penknife to his heart. Unkind fortune, that not one drop of his blood reached my hand. - Indeed, sir, I would never have washed it from it. - But tho' I have not the happiness to see it on my hand, I have the glorious satisfaction of remembring I saw it run in rivers on the floor; I saw it forsake his cheeks. I saw him fall a martyr to my revenge. And is the killing a villain to be called murder? Perhaps the law calls it so. - Let it call it what it will, or punish me as it pleases. - Punish me! - no, no - that is not in the power of man - not of that monster man, Mr. Booth." (34)

As if simply admitting to murder were not horrible enough, this speech reveals Miss Mathews' intense pleasure in her revenge, her lack of remorse, and her defiance of social law.¹⁶ Booth's horror at her speech is compounded by her appearance: "for her voice, her

¹⁶ While Fielding's representation of Miss Mathews as a wicked woman can be examined as an opposition to the ideal of Amelia, his choice of imagery and circumstances closely parallels other constructions of wicked women. As John Zomchick observes, trial narratives were also constructed in a way that emphasizes the dangers of female excess, the consequences for women who defy the boundaries set by society. Zomchick examines the "construction of the human subject," particularly the female subject, in the accounts of women found in both eighteenth-century novels and trial reports and argues that "both the popular and novelistic narratives construct a normative female subject with a sexuality dedicated to the production of domestic tranquility" (535). They then provide constructions of women who threaten this stability in order to reinforce it; the goal of the narratives is to be "able to distinguish good women from bad and to consign the latter to their proper places" (540). In the novels written by men, Zomchick observes constructions similar to those found in the trial narratives, especially the "representation of the eruption of female excess" (547).

looks, her gestures, were properly adapted to the sentiments she expressed. Such indeed was her image, that neither could Shakespeare describe, nor Hogarth paint, nor Clive act a Fury in higher perfection” (35). Miss Mathews embodies the myth of female anger; she is a Fury.

In spite of this clear evidence, Booth is seduced by her and only later recognizes the threat that Miss Mathews poses to his own marriage. After receiving an angry note from her, he realizes that he “had more particular reasons to apprehend the rage of a lady, who had given so strong an instance how far she could carry her revenge” (166). Further suggestion of Miss Mathews’ image as a social threat is offered by Col. James’ comparison of her to the threat of Pandora, the mythical account of the origins of human suffering that blames a woman’s indiscretion. Col. James states, “[I]f her mind was as full of iniquity as Pandora’s box was of diseases, I’d hug her close in my arms, and only take as much care as possible to keep the lid down for fear of mischief” (225). In this application, Miss Mathews becomes the force responsible for releasing human suffering and her body the very repository of those ills, yet men still embrace the temptation she offers.

As if her speech alone could not confirm her as a dangerous woman, the narrator offers a direct caution to the reader:

But before we put an end to this, it may be necessary to whisper a word or two to the critics, who have perhaps begun to express no less astonishment than Mr. Booth, that a lady, in whom we had remarked a most extraordinary power of displaying softness, should the very next moment after the words were out of our mouth, express sentiments becoming the lips of a Dalila, Jezebel, Medea, Semiramis, Parysatis, Tanaquil, Livilla, Messalina, Agrippina, Brunichilde, Elfrida, Lady Macbeth, Joan of Naples, Christian of Sweden, Katharine Hays, Sarah Malcolm, Con. Philips, or any other heroine of the tender sex, which history sacred or prophane, antient or modern, false or true hath recorded. (35-6)

Through this extensive catalog of domineering, vindictive, licentious, and even murderous women, the narrator appeals to the authority of history and clearly casts Miss

Mathews in the lot of “bad women.”¹⁷ The assessment of real virtue is the focus of the introduction to Miss Mathews. Fielding insures that the reader does not trust Miss Mathews’ subsequent “history,” even though Booth does.

To further support this caution that things are not as they appear, the narrator ends the chapter immediately preceding Miss Mathews’ “history” with a story about overhearing two women at the theater comment on a young woman who looked “so modest and so innocent” and in “the way of ruin” because she was alone with a young man. The narrator, knowing the “innocent” girl to be a famous bawd (the “inimitable B--y C-----s” [Betty Careless]), recalls the sordid reality the young woman’s modest appearance masked:

and yet, all appearances notwithstanding, I myself (remember, critic, it was in my youth) had a few mornings before seen that very identical picture of all those engaging qualities in bed with a rake at a bagnio, smoking tobacco, drinking punch, talking obscenity, and swearing and cursing with all the impudence and impiety of the lowest and most abandoned trull of a soldier. (36)¹⁸

With this as the concluding sentence of the chapter, the reader is left with no doubts as to the meaning of Fielding’s chapter heading: “endeavors to prove by reason and authority, that it is possible for a woman to appear to be what she really is not.” Fielding reinforces

¹⁷ See Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. McLeod’s study of the catalog tradition in literature is linked to the ongoing attempt to define femininity. Catalogs were a part of a classical tradition of reference and provided an accepted authority and evidence of consensus on a subject. This appeal to authority mediates between the author’s personal opinion and the reader, offering credibility for the author’s view. McLeod examines the use of catalogs in Greek, Roman, Medieval and Middle Age literature, the latter including the first catalog written by a woman, the *Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan, which defends women against misogyny. Fielding draws on a classical tradition familiar to his readers in order to provide a quick classification of Miss Mathews’ character. See also Scheuermann’s discussion of Fielding’s use of monster imagery in his characterization of several female characters.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note in this passage that the narrator participates in the double standard himself, by viewing his own presence at the brothel as a forgivable youthful error, even as he judges the woman corrupt for the same act.

the duplicity and paradox noted at the beginning of the chapter and represented in Miss Mathews fallen woman's narrative. Miss Mathews appears to be a gentlewoman and a victimized fallen woman but underneath is actually a manipulative, vicious, and evil woman.

Through the fallen woman's narrative Miss Mathews presents herself as a victim, but her subsequent reaction to her fallenness classifies her as wicked. Although tricked by Hebberts, she chose an immoral relationship with him and uses the pose of a victimized fallen woman to mask her immoral behavior. The reader is sufficiently warned about Miss Mathews' character and the quality of her story. The narrator later refers to her as a woman who "had forfeited all title to virtue" (171). Booth, without the benefit of the narrator's comments, has observed her behavior and is shown not to be engaged completely with her story, but his subsequent sexual affair with her reveals that he did not judge her behavior or her story accurately (or chooses to ignore the warning signs), ignorance he later regrets when Miss Mathews jealously pursues him and attempts to destroy his marriage.

Mrs. Bennet: A Portrait of Vice in Virtue

In placing Miss Mathews within the broader classification of fallen women as a sexual threat, Fielding achieves two goals in his theme of redefining morality. On the one hand, Fielding reveals the limitations of a classification like "fallen woman" and a strategy like the fallen woman's narrative when it substitutes for direct and active assessment of individual morality.¹⁹ On the other hand, Fielding plays on audience expectations of Amelia as angel and Miss Mathews as whore before challenging those

¹⁹ Bell observes the growing trend to see fallen women as victims in discourse concerning sexually compromised women from the beginning to the middle of the eighteenth century (127).

assumptions of female virtue with the characterization of Mrs. Bennet. Unlike Amelia, with her unchanging virtue, and Miss Mathews, with her uncontrollable vice, Mrs. Bennet defies simple classification as angel or monster.²⁰ While her sexual experience outside marriage defines her as fallen, Mrs. Bennet is portrayed more sympathetically as a good, although somewhat irritating, woman, an innocent victim, and a penitent fallen woman, who rises above the limitations placed on her to serve a productive, moral life. Mary Anne Schofield argues for similarities between Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet in that both are manipulators; the primary difference is that Mrs. Bennet uses reason rather than passion to guide her decisions. Like Miss Mathews, who is imprisoned by her sexual role, and Amelia, who is imprisoned by her virtuous role, Mrs. Bennet is given no more power over the “myth of female trivialization” than the others (Schofield 54). Spacks cites Miss Mathews as Fielding’s creation of the “woman-as-sinner” and Amelia as his “woman-as-saint,” but she never even mentions Mrs. Bennet, an omission that is particularly glaring because Mrs. Bennet plays such a crucial role in preventing Amelia from becoming a fallen woman. In “Henry Fielding’s Images of Women,” Mona Scheuermann only considers Mrs. Bennet in the context of her marriage to Sgt. Atkinson and her intellectual debates with Dr. Harrison. Through Mrs. Bennet, Scheuermann suggests, “Fielding dissects the Learned Lady largely by showing how a woman’s learning affects her relationship with her husband” (265). Scheuermann then dismisses Mrs. Bennet and does not consider how she is contrasted with Miss Mathews as well as with Amelia. I argue that Fielding develops both Mrs. Bennet’s similarities to and differences from Miss Mathews as he constructs her fallen woman’s narrative. In this

²⁰ Murial Williams sees Miss Mathews as portrait of Fielding’s “indictment of unrestrained passion” (117), while Mrs. Bennet, Williams suggests, is “one of Fielding’s most successful creations of mixed character” (107).

narrative, Fielding uses many of the same tools to convey her actions, words, and the purpose of her tale.

In establishing a context for Mrs. Bennet's story, the narrator emphasizes her sincerity as he had earlier exposed Miss Mathews' deception. The first way this is achieved is by aligning the reader's reactions with those of Amelia, who, unlike her husband, has shown herself to be a good judge of character. Upon first meeting Mrs. Bennet while playing cards, Amelia "began to entertain a compassion for her, which in good minds, that is to say, in minds capable of compassion, is certain to introduce some little degree of love or friendship" (188). Amelia's affection for Mrs. Bennet increases with each encounter, as "she thought she discovered something wonderfully good and gentle in her countenance and disposition, and was very desirous of knowing her whole history" (236). Amelia's perceptions play an important part in establishing Mrs. Bennet's image as a morally responsible character and a trustworthy narrator, an identity supported by the beneficial effect of her tale on Amelia.

Fielding's portrayal of Mrs. Bennet remains positive, even though it is very complicated. As Bell observes, Mrs. Bennet at different times is "pathetic, intermittently snobbish, frequently tipsy, helpful and an accessory to deception" (222). Morris Golden notes that she is guilty of vanity at the first masquerade that resulted in her seduction and of duplicity at the second masquerade where she poses as Amelia to gain her husband's advancement (*Moral* 70). Although Mrs. Bennet can be accused of emotional outbursts, drinking bouts, and intellectual arrogance, she is repeatedly portrayed as a positive character with minor weaknesses, pitiable circumstances, and forgivable mistakes. Fielding utilizes mythic masks in his characterization of Mrs. Bennet, but he always complicates her classification as simply good or bad, regardless of her identity as a fallen woman. Fielding's objective in such a contradictory characterization is to force the reader to discern her true moral character. Although Mrs. Bennet's weaknesses are

apparent and her status as a fallen woman should dictate a life of penance or prostitution, she manages to live a moral and productive life. Although Fielding gives Mrs. Bennet her share of weaknesses, he constructs a female character striving to live morally and generously in spite of her mistakes and the adversity she encounters.

Although ultimately portraying Mrs. Bennet as a positive character, Fielding gently satirizes her by aligning her with many stereotypical images. For example, Mrs. Bennet is presented as an educated woman, often pompous, sometimes misled, and frequently ridiculed by the knowledgeable Dr. Harrison. Part of this portrait is humorous, as in her argument against second marriages after she has agreed to marry Atkinson. She frightens Booth and Amelia by her vehement and inappropriate quotation from Virgil concerning Dido's refusal to remarry: "She repeated these lines with so strong an emphasis, that she almost frightened Amelia out of her wits, and not a little staggered Booth, who was himself no contemptible scholar" (258). In this and other scenes where she debates the issue of women's education, she fits the common target for satirizing intellectual women in the eighteenth century.

Yet Fielding's satirical treatment of Mrs. Bennet is mild. In "Fielding and Half-Learned Ladies," Carolyn D. Williams examines Fielding's partially sympathetic portrayal of educated women and demonstrates that, while Fielding's portrait of Mrs. Bennet in *Amelia* is not entirely positive, it differs from traditional stereotypes of learned ladies of his time:

Whatever his reasons, Fielding makes do with half-learned ladies. But he refuses to reduce them to caricatures. . . . Mrs. Atkinson, though not the perfect wife Amelia is intended to be, is presented as a good and attractive woman, whose faults are venial. (33)

Fielding also uses Mrs. Bennet's learning to make her a more sympathetic character. Following her broken relationship with her father and his minimal financial support, she

notes that “learning was the chief estate I inherited of my father, in which he had instructed me from my earliest youth” (272).

Instead of satirizing Mrs. Bennet, Fielding sketches a much harsher portrait of her aunt with whom she stays after her father forces her to leave because she does not get along with her new stepmother. Her cruel aunt, taking pride in her learning, appears ridiculous when she shows off “her whole little stock of knowledge” when flirting with the new rector, Mr. Bennet (283). Aware that she is competing for Mr. Bennet’s affection, the aunt despises her niece’s knowledge, derides her knowledge of Latin and Greek as useless, and concludes that she herself “had read all that was worth reading, tho’ she thanked heaven she understood no language but her own” (284). In addition to flaunting her own ignorance, Mrs. Bennet’s aunt proves to be a petty and cruel individual. Upon discovering the relationship between the young lovers, the aunt throws Mrs. Bennet out of the house, forcing their marriage and future financial problems. In contrast to this learned lady, clearly portrayed as a tyrannical bluestocking, Mrs. Bennet is characterized as capable of restraint, love, and compassion. According to Smallwood, Mrs. Bennet’s “chief role in the novel is not to be a learned lady but to be a woman with the capacity for genuine friendship” (138). Part of what tempers Fielding’s characterization of Mrs. Bennet is that she combines learning with life experience and uses that knowledge to help Amelia, an important trait of a moral person.

Another mask Fielding places on Mrs. Bennet is that of the domineering wife in her marriage to Sgt Atkinson. In the novel’s concluding chapter, the narrator states that

Mr. Atkinson upon the whole hath led a very happy life with his wife, though he hath been sometimes obliged to pay proper homage to her superior understanding and knowledge. This, however, he chearfully submits to, and she makes him proper returns of fondness. (544)

This criticism followed by praise is part of Fielding’s complex but basically positive characterization of Mrs. Bennet throughout the novel, as he uses her happy marriage as a

reward for her moral behavior. Not many critics acknowledge the positive construction of a woman in Mrs. Bennet. In her study of Fielding's "delineation of the female self" in *Amelia*, Schofield describes Mrs. Bennet's marriage to Sgt. Atkinson as another form of female trivialization.²¹ Eighteenth-century readers, both male and female, would not have agreed. As stated above, Fielding would have accepted that women's morality and position were defined within the domestic sphere and the duties of marriage, the realm Mrs. Bennet assumes as she lives a "very happy life" with Sgt. Atkinson and bears him "two fine sons" (244). Mrs. Bennet is valued because she is attracted to Atkinson's ability to love, as demonstrated by his dedication to Amelia. She chooses a caring companion, the goal of eighteenth-century feminists who argued for marriages based on love rather than property. Some could even argue, based on the evidence of the novel, that she finds a better husband than Amelia does.

Mrs. Bennet's second marriage is the key to her role in the novel. In *Masquerade and Civilization*, Terry Castle cites Mrs. Bennet's name change following her second marriage as one sign of her shifting identity and status:

... one does not know whether to regard her, in some deeper way, as the "unfortunate" Mrs. Bennet or the "fortunate" Mrs. Atkinson. Just as she is at once the victim of catastrophe and the embodiment of survival, Mrs. Atkinson is at once the same and different from herself: she is, indeed, Mrs. Bennet *and* Mrs. Atkinson. (220-221)

This dual identity in Mrs. Bennet is part of her strength rather than her weakness.

In addition to Mrs. Bennet's minor inconsistencies, her ability to deceive or withhold information is perhaps her most troubling feature, a trait made obvious at the masquerade to which Amelia and Booth are invited. This incident might suggest that,

²¹ Scheuermann sees the Atkinson marriage as a "third category of relationship" in Fielding's work but still an imperfect one: "and the imperfection is entirely on Mrs. Atkinson's side" (265). Although Scheuermann suggests that Fielding rewards his positive characters with marriage and children in all four novels, she never considers the Atkinsons and their two sons in that category (274).

like Miss Mathews, Mrs. Bennet can also appear to be what she is not. As Amelia's double in appearance and voice, Mrs. Bennet attends a masquerade disguised as Amelia, fooling even Booth himself. During the masquerade, she flirts with the same noble lord who raped her, and then she uses his interest in Amelia to secure a military position for Sgt. Atkinson. The narrator even refers to Mrs. Bennet's use of "a very bewitching softness," a direct echo of descriptions of Miss Mathews in jail (416). In her later account to Amelia and Booth, the narrator questions her complete honesty: "but whether she told the whole truth with regard to herself, I will not determine" (430).

While Fielding might be suggesting that Mrs. Bennet is also a temptress, he clearly contrasts this masquerade with the one that led to her fall and leaves the reader with the sense that, through her trick, Mrs. Bennet has saved Amelia from a similar fate and achieved a form of retribution for herself. Dr. Harrison himself approves of the "success of Amelia's stratagem" for avoiding the masquerade by sending Mrs. Bennet in her place (427). Even though Mrs. Bennet did not intend to meet the noble peer herself, as she talked with him "a thought suggested itself to her of making an advantage of this accident" (415). Her behavior is also contrasted with that of Miss Mathews, who appears at the same masquerade and directly threatens Booth with exposing their affair if he refuses to see her. According to the narrator, their interchange "consisted chiefly of violent upbraidings on her side, and excuses on his" (422). When she finally forces him to agree to meet with her once again, it is only under the threat of exposure, and "[a]s he knew the violence of the lady's passions, and to what heights they were capable of rising, he was obliged to come into these terms" (423). Booth's fear of Amelia discovering his affair is his primary concern. He never follows through until receiving another threat from Miss Mathews to "expect all the revenge of an injured woman" (494).

Although clearly not as threatening as Miss Mathews' efforts, Mrs. Bennet's negotiations with the noble lord could have damaged Amelia's reputation. Mrs. Bennet's

deception does cause a temporary breach in the friendship between the Atkinsons and the Booths, but her trick is not seriously injurious. Following Booth's initial discovery of Amelia and Mrs. Atkinson's switching places for the masquerade and realization that Mrs. Bennet had spent the evening with the noble lord, no one is very upset. Booth is primarily relieved that Amelia was not with the noble peer (426). When Amelia later realizes that Mrs. Bennet made promises to meet the noble lord in order to get a new title for Sgt. Atkinson, the argument becomes quite heated, with Mrs. Bennet (who had drunk a little brandy) calling Amelia "the most confounded prude upon earth" (452). Mrs. Bennet even goes so far as to say, "Well, I declare upon my soul then that if I was a man, rather than be married to a woman who makes such a fuss with her virtue, I would wish my wife was without such a troublesome companion" (453). Mrs. Bennet soon regrets her behavior, however, "beginning seriously to recollect that she had carried the matter rather too far, and might really injure Amelia's reputation, a thought to which the warm pursuit of her own interest had a good deal blinded her at the time" (478). Although she has already secured a commission for her husband, she confesses to the noble lord and clears Amelia's name. Following this reparation, Mrs. Bennet asks for Amelia's forgiveness and help in comforting her ill husband, who is upset by the fight between the two women. Mrs. Bennet's honest efforts to maintain relationships and help the Booths bring about an honorable end to the conflict are valued, even though her efforts are flawed by self-interest.

In addition to the direct consequences of her attending the masquerade and preserving Amelia, Mrs. Bennet's efforts provide the basis for many of the positive changes that restore equilibrium at the novel's conclusion.²² Castle describes the

²² Note also that the implications of Mrs. Bennet using her sexual attraction to gain preferment is a pattern typical of mistresses to nobility. Being a courtesan did frequently result in money and titles for a woman and her family. See Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History*.

masquerade in English culture and literature from 1720-1790, examining its function as a clear emblem of evil while continuing to exist as a popular site for freedom and transformation. In literature, Castle observes that masquerades always ostensibly serve as a sign of social and moral decay, but they consistently serve important plot functions, providing an impetus for positive transformation of both character and plot. In Fielding's *Amelia*, Castle argues, the final masquerade is the turning point of the novel in plot, style, and theme. While the masquerade initially appears to be the site of moral confusion and danger for all the characters, particularly Booth and Amelia, the encounters there provide the basis for the improvements which take place later in the novel. By clearly making the masquerade a site for the transformation of plot and character, Fielding ends up problematizing the simplistic moral scheme on which the first half of the novel is based.

Noting particularly the transforming power the masquerade provides Mrs. Bennet, Castle refers to Mrs. Bennet's narrative power to make her experience allegorical or comical:

If her first masquerade was a kind of "exquisite Distress"—productive, in an oxymoronic way, of benefits as well as sufferings—her second is an unalloyed fulfillment of comic possibility. One might call it a rewriting of the first, for Mrs. Atkinson here revises, so to speak, that dysphoric "masquerade tale" written for her the first time around by the Noble Peer. She inverts the fictional pattern of manipulation by entrapping him in a "plot," a scheme of comic revenge. (229)

Castle emphasizes that the change that Mrs. Bennet creates is not only positive but also permanent. Castle sees Mrs. Bennet playing an important revisionary role in the plot and the novel:

One could say that Mrs. Atkinson [Mrs. Bennet] rewrites the melodramatic masquerade tale of the past—the tale of female humiliation and abuse—along the redemptive lines of stage comedy. By one scintillating hoax she alters the genre of her own history. No longer the degraded heroine in a trite and pathos-ridden story, she has become the resourceful protagonist in a witty comedy of retribution. (230-31)

What is most important for Castle's concern is the way Mrs. Bennet's transformation of her own fate and significance parallels that of the masquerade itself. Through her characterization and her fallen woman's narrative, Fielding also transforms definitions of women's morality.

The masks of fallen woman, learned lady, temptress, monster, or shrew do not ultimately define Mrs. Bennet's identity. Neither is her moral status so readily classified. Castle, like other critics, discusses the moral ambiguity of Mrs. Bennet's character, particularly her "violations of decorum": drinking, scholarship, and marrying below her class. But, Mrs. Bennet's flaws are never shown to be destructive:

[S]he embodies certain kinds of chaos and intractability the narrator has elsewhere castigated [particularly in the early prison portrayals of women]. Yet Mrs. Atkinson is never definitively unmasked by the narrator--certainly not in the way, say, that Mrs. Ellison is, or the Noble Peer himself. She is never merely dismissed, either in moral or in narrative terms. (222)

Mrs. Bennet is unquestionably aligned both with vice through her fallen woman's story and with virtue through her role in the plot. According to Golden, "the complexity of Mrs. Bennet suggests, moreover, in *Amelia* Fielding can examine seriously - identify with - a female figure combining guilt and a pragmatic will to act well in the world" ("Public" 381):

Like Booth, Mrs. Bennet, whose attempt to help with the family fortunes infects her husband with venereal disease, projects her author's sense of necessarily incurring guilt with action in the England of mid-century. Morally and physically, she has caught the world's plague, fallen in class, co-operated in duplicity, even taken to drink to escape the complications of her life. Yet she persists in seeking the good. Emphasized in the novel's structure - for her parlour narrative comes in the climactic middle (book VII) - Mrs. Bennet represents what is typical among life's experiences, what ties Fielding's sense of a limited self to the sordid world of 1750. ("Public" 382-383)

In spite of her apparently contradictory image, Mrs. Bennet is clearly a significant and positive force in the book and she becomes classifiable as a moral woman in Fielding's own moral scheme.

Fielding's complicated portrayal of Mrs. Bennet is very similar to the technique Bell observes in William Hogarth's engraving series called *The Harlot's Progress* (1731), where stereotypical images of women are utilized but challenged. Behind the overt didacticism of the series, which traces the decline of young M. Hackabout from her arrival in London through her prostitution, imprisonment, disease, and death, Bell detects the challenge to accepted social, moral, and legal categories found in Hogarth's irony as well as the complexity, and even the incongruity, which Hogarth subtly incorporates into each picture. Bell notes that "the covert effect of the entire series is to destabilise the more orthodox legal and moral attitudes which the overall pattern of the narrative seems initially to reinforce" (134). Bell's analysis provides useful insight into Fielding's methods of employing and challenging the accepted images of women. Although Amelia and Miss Mathews are blatantly contrasted, Mrs. Bennet is a foil for, but not a direct contrast to, Miss Mathews or Amelia. Bell's assertion about *The Harlot's Progress* applies just as well to *Amelia*: "the prints [narratives] simply accumulate the different images of prostitution which expressed the ideological confusions surrounding women's sexuality and the law, without seeking to reconcile them or arbitrate decisively between them" (135). Bell notes that in construction of the fallen woman figure "the artist avoids any easy categorisation of his harlot as either pathetic victim or vile temptress. She remains, instead, an enigmatic figure" (136), an ambivalence also found in Fielding's construction of Mrs. Bennet, especially as she contrasts with Miss Mathews' role as vile temptress.

Fielding constructs Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet from the myriad of images applied to women but shows that these categories, while appropriate in some instances, are not definitive of all women. As Bell observes of Hogarth's portrayal of fallen women:

By making the same figure at different times represent the lascivious, self-seeking whore, and the forlorn persecuted maiden, already familiar to contemporary readers . . . , Hogarth is interrogating the prevailing ideology of female sexuality most rigorously, . . . showing that the range of existing images is riven with contradictions and ironies. (137-138)

Fielding exacts a similar “interrogation” of the fallen woman stereotype through his portrayal of Mrs. Bennet and her contrast to Miss Mathews, as the process of representation and then enactment through her role in the frame narrative challenges the reader’s assumptions and understanding of the invoked images. Although Mrs. Bennet’s weaknesses are apparent, she manages “to retrieve the ill consequences of a foolish conduct,” according to Fielding’s moral scheme, and to become a complex character who does not fit into what Spacks calls the myth of changelessness and compliance. Fielding’s shift from relying on female stereotypes to allowing for individual female complexity is part of his construction of an overall moral scheme of struggling manfully with vice, a construction that reveals his dependence on and deviation from more commonly accepted social constructions of women.

Agency of Women

Fielding’s strategy of presenting and then complicating the images of fallen women through Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet is also achieved by each woman’s role in the narrative structure. Within their own narratives, Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet function as passive victims of male sexual aggression as shown above. Each is characterized by faults that contribute to her vulnerability, such as vanity, but those traits serve to classify their position as women within the limitations of their society.²³

²³ Fielding clearly shows the fallen women to be at the mercy of social restrictions in their roles as daughters, wives, mistresses. Both are fairly powerless, and their material, personal, social, and emotional losses are the primary theme. For Miss Mathews, life as Hebberts’ mistress is isolated and humiliating:

When he was present, life was barely tolerable, but when he was absent, nothing could equal the misery I endured. I past [sic] my hours almost entirely

Within the frame narrative, however, fallen women are given some agency. As storytellers, each constructs her tale and shapes its meaning for her audience, a power denied to Amelia. But speech alone does not constitute women's agency; the important question is whether they function in the plot as passive, static objects or active, transformed and transforming agents. Miss Mathews, as a corrupt fallen woman, remains an obstacle for Booth's moral development and her only function in the plot is to seduce and then pursue him. Even her threat to the Booth's marriage, which Booth fears throughout the novel, is undermined in the end when Booth learns that Amelia has known about his affair with Miss Mathews and has already forgiven him. Miss Mathews remains within the category of destructive sexual woman throughout the novel, an obstacle for Booth's development but capable of no transformation of her own. Mrs. Bennet's function, on the other hand, goes beyond her image as the penitent fallen woman. She exerts power within the plot that influences Amelia's life and shapes her own, a function that reveals Fielding's challenge to existing definitions of feminine virtue but is also part of his construction of the moral possibilities for women.

Fielding's use of the fallen woman's narrative to present the moral possibilities for women is a logical extension of his conception of the moral uses of fiction. While my analysis of the images and agency of fallen women within *Amelia* exposes the basic

alone: for no company, but what I despised, would consort with me. Abroad I scarce ever went, lest I should meet any of my former acquaintance; for their sight would have plunged a thousand daggers in my soul. . . . how have the thoughts of my lost honour torn my soul! (48)

Miss Mathews' condition is compounded by the disapproval and disgust of her landlady who discovers she and Hebberts are not married. When Miss Mathews later discovers that Hebberts was not married when he convinced her to become his mistress and had only recently married her old rival, the Widow Carey, she falls into a fit, for which she receives no assistance from the landlady, who Miss Mathews says regarded her "rather as a monster than a woman" (50). Such is the fate of a mistress, even a mistress who had willingly defied society's sexual conventions. The limitations of that position are made painfully apparent.

ideology about women's morality that the narrative conveys rather than any social reality about the possibilities for fallen women, Fielding's references to the uses of fiction assume a more direct correlation between art and life. Fielding's view of narrative is conveyed through the theory of "histories" which he offers in *Amelia*, but it is also demonstrated by his use of interpolated narratives, particularly the function of the fallen women's narratives. Narration, the construction of life into story, becomes a metaphor for life. Life, Fielding observes, "may as properly be called an art as any other" (14), and "histories" about life follow a pattern:

as histories of this kind, therefore, may properly be called models of HUMAN LIFE; so by observing minutely the several incidents which tend to the catastrophe or completion of the whole, and the minute causes whence those incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all arts, which I call the ART OF LIFE. (14)

In this address, Fielding's narrator interprets the way a narrative provides "models of human life." Instructed by these models, readers integrate these patterns into their own lives. Therefore, the narrative structure of a "history" recreates the "ART OF LIFE" (14). Fielding uses narrative to convey what he perceives as reality, while still showing that fiction (on all levels, from the novel to a personal "history") is a creative process, and an important one, that influences our ways of seeing and understanding.

While Fielding believes that narratives convey what actually happens in life, he clearly recognizes the "construction" of self and society that goes on in fiction making. Although literature represents the "truth" of human nature, it is also a process influenced by perception and understanding. Fielding's novels consistently emphasize a narrator's ability to sway the reader's perceptions of life/truth through his process of creating fiction. Susan K. Howard, in her article, "The Intrusive Audience in Fielding's *Amelia*," states that "Fielding also explores the manner in which life may become an art in the hands of a fictionmaker" (287). Through these interpolated tales, Fielding shows that the

narrative structures shaping the “art of life” are utilized at the public and private levels. Not only does an author convey the “art of life” for the instruction of the novel’s reader, but the individual characters also offer their own narratives for the instruction of other characters and the readers.²⁴ Fielding chooses to use narrative layers and dedicates a significant number of pages to interpolated narratives in order to demonstrate the force of the narrative process on the way life is perceived.

In *Amelia*, Fielding utilizes the fallen women’s narratives within his own narrative strategy to demonstrate how narrative functions in the process of perception, understanding, and action, as we see characters both narrate and enact their moral positions. Fallen women’s narratives, with their emphasis on narrativity, reveal how fiction is shaped by context and by the motive and values of the teller. Miss Mathews’ tale demonstrates that a narrative may actually be used to corrupt the art of life. After Miss Mathews’ tale of seduction and Booth’s tale of courtship and marriage, the “models of human life” lead to more seduction and adultery. Even Mrs. Bennet’s tale highlights the constructedness of “histories” and of fiction in general.

By shifting virtue from an object to an activity and the art of moral living from a literary subject to a narrative strategy, Fielding constructs a moral scheme in which the moral person is one with agency, with the power to act morally rather than be moral and the power to construct a moral “history.” As Smallwood indicates, Fielding’s moral scheme begins with the wise and virtuous person trying to live prudently, embodied in the consistent ideal of Amelia. The structure of the novel, though, indicates that resistance and avoidance are not necessarily enough to cope with the chaos, confusion, hypocrisy, and deceit that infiltrates every realm of society. In Fielding’s moral scheme, as evidenced by Booth and Mrs. Bennet, when a person fails to live prudently because of

²⁴ See also Cheryl Wanko, “Characterization and the Reader’s Quandary in Fielding’s *Amelia*.”

either internal or external forces, the virtuous person attempts to correct mistakes and rise above them.

Within this broader narrative strategy, Fielding uses the interpolated narratives of Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet to reinforce his moral scheme. Although each narrative is structured in a way that might elicit a sympathetic response and serve a didactic purpose, the moral strength of each woman and her motive for telling her story determine the effect each narrative actually achieves and its success in instructing her audience in the art of life.

Miss Mathews, who allows her vanity and rage to guide her every action, is unable to utilize her history to serve any purpose and remains an impotent force within her own tale and within the novel as a whole. Although she presents herself as a victim of a deceitful seduction within her own tale, she continues in her affair with Hebberts until forced to respond to his departure. Even after learning that she has been tricked by a promise of marriage, Miss Mathews chooses to be his mistress and finds herself powerless to do anything but lash out against the man who hurt her (literally stabbing Hebberts with a pen knife).

As her own position in prison demonstrates, her behavior has restricted the roles she can play. She is reduced from a mistress practically imprisoned in her apartment, with no socially acceptable position, to an accused murderess imprisoned in the legal system. Her role within her own narrative is repeated in her role in the novel's plot. As shown previously, she uses her narrative to tempt Booth rather than edify him. As she pursues an illicit relationship with Booth and attempts to destroy his marriage, her destructive behavior is emphasized. In the end, she is given full responsibility for her fate as Colonel James' domineering mistress, as the narrator summarizes: "The colonel hath kept Miss Mathews ever since, and is at length grown to doat on her (though now very disagreeable in her person, and immensely fat) to such a degree, that he submits to be

treated by her in the most tyrannical manner” (543). John Zomchick makes an interesting connection between Miss Mathews and Blear-eyed Moll, who is a “figure latent within Miss Mathews.” In the end, when Miss Mathews “has grown to be fat and domineering, we are meant to recognize a poetic justice in the transformation. Her true *nature* finally appears as one bearing the unsightly excesses of an unrestrained-and thus unfeminine-appetite” (553). Fielding constructs Miss Mathews as an obstacle in the plot’s structure and her fallen woman’s narrative serves as Booth’s first temptation and fall.

Mrs. Bennet’s history, on the other hand, serves as an immediate model for Amelia’s behavior toward the noble lord and a general model for the readers’ moral behavior. Because her history is an account of struggling to overcome adversity and because her motives are genuinely altruistic, Mrs. Bennet’s history provides a model of the novel’s theme. As Golden observes, Mrs. Bennet is one of the “good people” in the novel (*Moral* 70), because she is an example of Fielding’s “moral psychology”:

In Fielding’s view . . . [m]an is subjected to passions, and he is therefore a prey to delusions and to the imposition of hypocrisy as he tries to deal with outside actuality. As an aid in assessing reality . . . he may have reason and its experiential subsidiary, prudence. . . . [but] the overwhelming need is to be aware of the humanity of others, so that we may understand them, respond to them, and act suitably on the dictates of our charitable impulses. (*Moral* 148)

While Golden is describing Fielding’s view of man, and Booth in particular, I suggest this same “moral psychology” is exemplified by Fielding’s pairing of Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet. Both are fallen women. But unlike Miss Mathews, who only follows passion, Mrs. Bennet, acting on her charitable impulses, becomes an example of the novel’s moral ideal, a character who struggles actively (“manfully”) with adversity and rises above it. By revealing the social limitations Mrs. Bennet faces as a woman and the social benefits she achieves as a moral individual, Fielding uses her to challenge constructions of female virtue as passive and to assert that women must also assume active moral agency. Mrs. Bennet is an active moral agent when she warns Amelia of the

noble lord's advances and later when she serves as a wife and mother, restored to what are considered socially acceptable roles in spite of her status as a fallen woman.

Fielding also reinforces his moral scheme through the resolutions he offers, where every action has a consequence suited to the degree of moral effort. In the moral and comedic conclusion to the novel, where all characters get what they deserve, Mrs. Bennet's reward contrasts with other characters' punishments. The attorney Murphy, who aided Amelia's sister in forging their mother's will, is hanged, and Amelia's deceptive sister, Miss Harris, dies "in a most miserable manner" (544). In this final scheme, Fielding does not use the fallen woman as the emblem of sin or sexuality; many other characters suffer more serious consequences. Even Miss Mathews is given a stable albeit socially unacceptable position as Col. James' mistress. The final consequences also reveal that the libertine rake and the bawd are punished more severely than the victims of seduction: the noble lord "was at last become so rotten, that he stunk above ground [with syphilis]" and Mrs. Ellison had "fallen a martyr to her liquor" (544). Unlike Mrs. Bennet, who rises above her fall, others, such as Robinson, who try feebly to reform, are too corrupted to succeed: "So apt are men [and fallen women], whose manners have been once thoroughly corrupted, to return, from any dawn of an amendment, into the dark paths of vice" (544). With the exception of Booth, Mrs. Bennet is the only character guilty of some sin who is rewarded with a happy life. Golden sees Mrs. Bennet's role in the novel as supporting "the general theme of overcoming life's hardships, ending up with the saved to show the value of normal institutions and of intense involvement" (382). I would suggest that he also uses the fallen woman's narrative to emphasize that the art of fiction influences the art of life and that narratives can be used for both moral and immoral purposes. The reader and audience must look beyond simplistic didactic messages and stereotypes to judge morality as action, not ideals. In *Amelia*, Fielding's

fallen women are socially and physically victims of male seduction, but each woman has the power to deal with her circumstances nobly and virtuously.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, I describe the characteristics of a narrative paradigm I have found in several novels by Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, a paradigm that I call the fallen woman's narrative. From that description, I have attempted to answer one central question: How did Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding utilize the fallen woman's narrative in their own novelistic efforts? Like any study of literature, one question leads to many others, and I have traced within this dissertation my answer to what I see as secondary questions as well: What does the fallen woman's narrative reveal about views of women and sexuality in eighteenth-century England? How do narrative structures contain, create, and yet challenge assumptions about women's morality? After summarizing my discoveries about the fallen woman's narrative, I would like to review additional questions that have emerged in my research and which suggest possible directions for research in the future.

Discoveries

I began this study by exploring the fallen woman in eighteenth-century novels by men. In several texts, I observed first-person accounts of a woman's fall. Each story, whether an interpolated tale or a brief episode of a longer novel, contains recurring characteristics and similar rhetorical strategies. From these examples, I have defined a particular narrative paradigm, the fallen woman's narrative, that I believe plays an important role in these novels. The fallen woman's narrative is distinct from other

literary representations of fallen women in its unique insistence on narrativity: the first-person narrator and an immediate context for telling the tale to a specific audience. In each instance, the first-person narrator acknowledges from the start that she is a fallen woman and that her story will explain the circumstances surrounding her fall. While original in its emphasis on how narrative is constructed and received, the fallen woman's narrative contains structural, stylistic, thematic, and didactic features found in various seduction narratives of the eighteenth century. These features include a plot in which the woman is always the object and never the agent of seduction; a female character who is unbelievably beautiful and talented and understandably a bit vain; circumstances in which a woman's severe financial limitations make her more powerless and vulnerable to seduction; and direct warnings to the audience to avoid similar temptations.

In each novel containing a fallen woman's narrative, the author works with and against specific narrative conventions as part of his own novelistic effort. In *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, the fallen woman's narrative is evident in the opening explanation of each woman's fall. While elements of the fallen woman's narrative elicit sympathy for each woman's victimization by society's limits and her seducer's power, the characterization of Moll and Roxana as fallen women is only one facet of Defoe's more complex portrayal. Rather than focus only on the causes of a woman's initial fall, Defoe places more importance on Moll's and Roxana's responsibility for moral action in subsequent situations where they have more choice. By utilizing and then contradicting the conventions of the fallen woman's narrative for his characterization of Moll and Roxana, Defoe suggests that the rhetoric of penitence must be supported by moral action.

In *Clarissa*, Richardson portrays a young woman who consistently acts according to what she sees as society's standards for a virtuous woman, even though others judge her to be a fallen woman. After her rape by Lovelace, she becomes more concerned with how she can best defend her innocence to the world than with practical solutions like

marrying Lovelace. Although Anna Howe and her mother ask Clarissa to construct a separate story from the account offered in her letters, Clarissa never completes what I argue would have been a fallen woman's narrative. Instead she relies on other evidence of her virtue: her carefully planned coffin inscriptions, her final will and letters, and her death itself. More important, she consciously chooses to have the story of her seduction and fall presented to others after her death through Belford's compilation of her and Lovelace's correspondence. In these letters, which relinquish part of her story to other people's accounts, Clarissa's virtue and innocence are defended well and perhaps even better than they would have been by her own fallen woman's narrative. Whether Clarissa abandons her plan to write a fallen woman's narrative for emotional, physical, social, or even religious reasons, her choice to offer epistolary evidence of her virtue serves to reinforce Richardson's own choice of the epistolary genre, one that engages the reader in the process of moral debate rather than direct moral observation.

In many ways, Fielding's use of the fallen woman's narrative offers a similar message to that offered by Defoe and Richardson: that, although a woman's virtue should not be judged by her chastity alone, her true morality should be determined by more than her words. The interpolated stories by Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet share the conventional features of other fallen women's narratives, but, because Fielding has each woman tell her story to a specific person in a carefully constructed context, these fallen women's narratives serve as a clearer example of the narrativity that characterizes this particular narrative paradigm. Further, the act of narration itself takes on greater significance when Miss Mathews' and Mrs. Bennet's stories play crucial roles in the plot of *Amelia*, with Miss Mathews' story tempting Booth into an adulterous affair and Mrs. Bennet's story warning Amelia of the threat of seduction. Fielding uses the fallen woman's narrative to support an important theme in *Amelia*: that "histories," such as the

fallen woman's narrative and his own novel, can have significant impact on the audience and, if used appropriately, can aid the cause of virtuous behavior.

In addition to using the fallen woman's narrative as part of his characterization, style, or theme, each author also uses this narrative paradigm to construct his view of women, and particularly women's sexuality, by interrogating the degree to which a woman's "fall" (whether tricked or forced, willing or unwilling) relates to her ability to function as a moral individual in society. In a society where the category of fallen woman suggests a physical and moral condition that cannot be repaired, these stories can serve as both confirmation of society's definition of female virtue and critique of the limits of such a definition. By allowing a fallen woman to tell her own story and justify herself, each author elicits sympathy for a woman's victimization. At the same time, Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding never challenge the importance of female chastity and marriage. Each author also questions the power and limits of narrative and rhetoric, because the fallen woman's narrative in and of itself does not prove a woman's morality. The motive for and use of the fallen woman's narrative within the broader context of the novel determine whether a fallen woman may be redeemed morally and socially.

Defoe concludes that, although a woman's initial fall may be understandable and even forgivable, her response to her fallen condition is the most important factor in determining whether she has the potential to be redeemed morally. After her fall, Moll chooses what is most practical rather than moral, and only confesses her sins when faced with death at Newgate. Roxana, although embracing society's definition of her fallenness, consciously and repeatedly chooses to sin. When she attempts to cover up her crimes, she commits even greater sins and is tormented by fear and guilt. The rhetoric of confession alone cannot save a fallen woman, a message evident particularly in Moll's case, where even the sincerity of her penitence is not clearly confirmed at the end.

Although both Moll and Roxana are sympathetic as a fallen women, their morality must be assessed by actions as well as words.

Richardson and Fielding portray more possibilities for a fallen woman to be considered moral. Richardson redefines female virtue as a spiritual rather than merely physical condition. While the esteem lavished on Clarissa's dead body suggests that a fallen woman may still be considered a moral individual when the victim of unreasonable parents and the most brutal of seductions, Clarissa's choice to embrace death rather than life reinforces the impossibility of even a moral fallen woman living a productive and satisfying life. Only Fielding is able to construct a fallen woman like Mrs. Bennet who lives a happy, productive life, particularly after using her experience to appropriately guide and warn another woman. At the same time, Fielding also demonstrates that not all fallen women reclaim themselves. The contrasting portrait of Miss Mathews and her manipulation of the fallen woman's narrative to seduce Booth is evidence that adhering to rhetorical conventions cannot secure a narrative's intended function. Like the narratives of Moll and Roxana, Miss Mathews' story reinforces the limits faced by a woman who does not choose to live by society's standards.

My initial concern for the portrayal of fallen women and their social possibilities results from what I consider a feminist reading of canonical works: a feminist critique (via Elaine Showalter) or re-visioning (via Adrienne Rich) of texts with concerns for the way women are represented. Although my interest became more narratological, I never relinquished my concern for the way narrative inscribes possibilities for women as speakers and agents in a given narrative. Narrativity, the emphasis on the relationship between a first-person narrator and her audience, emerges as a significant feature of the fallen woman's narrative. The concern for narrative structure and audience expectations are also important features of Defoe's, Richardson's, and Fielding's novels. The introductions to these novels, the comments of other characters, and comments made by

the fallen women narrators themselves all provide evidence of the significance of the narrativity that characterizes the fallen woman's narrative. As I analyze how the fallen woman's narrative fits each author's purpose and final narrative, I am most intrigued by the way each author utilizes this particular narrative paradigm as a means of developing specific characters, narrative styles, and themes.

Questions

Although the narrative structure and each author's particular adaptation of the fallen woman's narrative has been my focus, I would like to acknowledge several unanswered questions. Any analysis contains issues that could be developed, gaps that could be explained, and contexts that could be studied. Below I suggest a few possibilities for further study.

The first issue to emphasize is that the fallen woman's narrative is not limited to the four novels I have identified. Two narratives that I would like to pursue are found in Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). Smollett's fallen woman's narrative is the long, first-person account by a "Lady of Quality" (the famous Lady Vane). Her story of scandalous affairs aligns this tale more with Moll's and Roxana's narratives, and the chapter title, "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality," suggests features of the scandalous memoirs which are one source for the fallen woman's narrative. The story's narrativity is a clear indicator of Smollett's use of this account as a fallen woman's narrative. The chapters which frame her tale establish her relationship to her audience, particularly Peregrine himself who is "smitten with her beauty, and so ravished with her compassion" for a poor widow they have both befriended (431). After telling her story to a "select partie," her ladyship is shocked when one listener charges her with "want of candour"; she is relieved when her accuser only observes that she omitted accounts of her "uncommon charity" and her husband's

unjust treatment, details which serve to strengthen her character rather than weaken it (538). In each scene, Smollett uses the fallen woman's narrative to support his own satirical purpose.

In Goldsmith's text, Olivia Primrose explains to her father how their wealthy neighbor Mr. Thornhill seduced her. Although her actual account contains many elements of the fallen woman's narrative, it is not complete and is not offered entirely in retrospect as many fallen women's narratives are. Only after several important plot twists is Olivia redeemed by the discovery that her sham wedding ceremony was actually performed with a *real* marriage license and priest (much to the surprise of her seducer). Goldsmith, writing within the sentimental tradition, draws heavily on our sympathy for Olivia, further capitalizing on the tragedy of her unjust fall by offering the false news that Olivia has died of shame and misery. By utilizing language ("angel," "heaven is a finer place than this") and actions (falling on knees, tears) similar to those found in *Clarissa*, Goldsmith elicits sympathy from the audience before revealing that Olivia is alive and actually a married rather than fallen woman.

In addition to tracing the fallen woman's narrative in other novels, I would also like to pursue further both its origin and influence. The link of the fallen woman's narrative to earlier romance/seduction plots by both men and women needs to be explored. In looking at some earlier fiction by women, I have found similarities in plot, imagery, characterization, and theme, but rarely have I encountered the narrativity found in the fallen woman's narrative. Those that do utilize such narrativity deserve additional attention. Other specific sources might be explored in Restoration drama, criminal biography, the scandalous memoir, pamphlets, and periodical literature in the eighteenth century.

In considering the influence of the fallen woman's narrative on later fiction, the field becomes even broader. As stated above, the relationship to sentimental and satirical

novels offers possibilities. The relationship of the fallen woman's narrative to nineteenth-century novelistic representations of fallen women would also be significant to develop. The most notable difference between the narratives I have examined and some nineteenth-century fiction containing fallen women, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* or Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is the absence of the particular type of narrativity I have defined. More nineteenth-century novels have the fallen woman as the central heroine but in a novel with a third-person narrator.

Where we end up in criticism is never where we expected to be. The journey of analysis and exploration leads to discoveries in the text and in our experience with the text that prevents any definitive and comprehensive analysis. The function of the fallen woman's narrative in these four novels is a small sampling of the role it might have played within eighteenth-century society and literature. Like Samuel Johnson in *Rasselas*, this is the conclusion in which nothing is concluded but many possibilities are contemplated.

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VITA

Education

I have completed the Doctoral program in English at Loyola University of Chicago (1989 to present). My Master of Arts in Literature degree is from Arizona State University, Tempe (1987-1988), where I wrote “Tobias George Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random*: A Critical Edition” as my Masters Thesis. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree from Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, in 1983, in English Education.

Teaching Experience

I have been an Assistant Professor of English at Goshen College since 1993, teaching courses in British Literature, the Novel, Women’s Literature, First-Year Literature, and Composition. Prior to accepting the position at Goshen College, I taught one year as a Future Faculty Teaching Fellow at Illinois Benedictine College, Lisle, Illinois (1992-1993). During my graduate study at Loyola (1989-1993), I taught an upper-level Restoration and Eighteenth-century Literature course in addition to five sections of first-year composition. At Arizona State University (1987-1988), I taught five sections of first-year composition. From 1983-1987, I was an English teacher at Christopher Dock High School, Lansdale, Pennsylvania, teaching general literature and composition courses at all grade levels with special courses on British Literature, the Short Story, and Creative Writing.

Professional Experience

In 1996-1997 I served as the supervisor of the Writing Tutor program at Goshen College. I also helped write and was awarded a Multicultural Affairs grant to fund a field trip to Chicago for all sections of the first-year Literature course, *Writing About America*. In the spring of 1997, I received an on-campus grant funded by the Lilly Foundation to develop the use of technology in teaching composition. I also was appointed to serve on the Collegiate Press Editorial Advisory Board in spring of 1997. In the past four years as an assistant professor at Goshen College I have served on various committees; functioned as a student advisor for English majors and first-semester freshmen; and supervised the English department's Broadside poetry board (1993-1996) and Pinchpenny Press publication board (1996-present).

At Loyola University, I served as Research Assistant to Thomas Kaminski (1992) and Ruth McGugan (1992), student representative for the English Graduate Student Association (1991-1992), and student representative to the Graduate Faculty (1990-1991). At Arizona State University, I was a Research Assistant to J.R. Brink in the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (1988).

Presentations

The Indiana College English Association accepted my paper titled, "Seducing the Reader in *Moll Flanders*: The Fallen Woman's Narrative and Defoe's 'amorous Chain of Story'" for their October 1994 conference. In February 1994, I gave a lecture titled "Bharati Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories*: A Voice for 'Altered America'" for the "Let's Talk About It" series at Nappanee Public Library. I presented a paper titled, "Penitents or Prostitutes: Narratives of Fallen Women in Fielding's *Amelia*" at the October 1993 meeting of the Midwest Association for the Society of Eighteenth Century Studies.

Academic Awards

I have received the following awards: Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship (Loyola University, 1993); Preparation for Future Faculty Teaching Fellowship (Loyola University, 1992-1993); University Teaching Fellowship (Loyola University, 1991-1992); Loyola Graduate Research Assistantship (Loyola University, 1990-1999); Loyola Graduate Teaching Assistantship (Loyola University, 1989-1990); Arizona State Research Fellowship (A.S.U., 1988); Arizona State Teaching Assistantship (A.S.U., 1987-1988), and Menno Simons Scholarship (Goshen College, 1979-1983).

Professional Memberships

I am a member of the Midwest Association of the Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Midwest Modern Language Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English.

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Beth Martin Birky has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

7/23/97

Date

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Director's Signature